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THE

LITERARY CHARACTER.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY THOMAS DAVISON, WHITEFRIARS.

Disraeli, Isaac

THE

LITERARY CHARACTER,

ILLUSTRATED

BY

THE HISTORY

OF

MEN OF GENIUS,

DRAWN FROM THEIR OWN FEELINGS AND CONFESSIONS.

BY I. D'ISRAELI.

THIRD EDITION,

CONSIDERABLY ENLARGED AND IMPROVED.

" Poi che veder voi stessi non possete,
Vedete in altri almen quel che voi sete."
Cino da Pistoia, addressed to the Eyes of his Mistress.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE-STREET.

1822.

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PREFACE.

I HAVE returned for the third time to a subject which has occupied my inquiries from early life, with feelings not less delightful, and with an enthusiasm not greatly diminished. I hope, I shall not need to apologise for the considerable enlargements which the work has received through its successive editions; these will at least attest my unfailing zeal.

Should this work, hereafter, be found useful, its merit will consist in the first and single idea of pursuing the history of genius by the similar events which have occurred to men of genius. Had not this

principle on which the whole work is constructed, struck me in my youth, the materials which illustrate the Literary Character could not have been brought together. After that principle was formed, the rest was but a record of associations—a chain, to which a link was frequently added—conclusions, which had often been suggested, but not always demonstrated. The philosophy of biography has rarely been discovered; while the lives of literary characters are too often composed one like another, it must remain unconnected with that history of the human mind of which it forms an important part. Searching into literary history for the literary character, seemed to me as forming a collection of experiments, where every repetition verified the former one; by the great philosophical principle of induction, inferences were deduced and princi-

ples established, which, however vague and doubtful in speculation, are irresistible when the appeal is made to facts as they relate to others, and to feelings which must be decided on as they are passing in our own breast.

It may be thought that men of genius only should write on men of genius. Some arguments might perhaps be stated, why they would not succeed in this task so well as an unwearied observer. Reflection, and experience, the fruits of time, are at least the possession of good sense and diligence. It is not expected of the historian, that he should perform the heroic deeds he records; nor do we require of the physician that he should participate in the malady of the patient, that he may treat it more judiciously. My heroes are men of genius, but I am only their historian; and my work sometimes re-

sembles in its nature one of those systems of medicine where, among its numerous classes, the invalid may fall on his own case.

It has been considered, that the subject of this work might have been treated with more depth of metaphysical disquisition; I might admire this profundity in others, but no one would in me! To tell a story requires no aid from metaphysics; it would be calling for an axe to break an egg.

It would be rather desirable that this work should be considered as dramatic; for, in truth, the events are the ordinary incidents of life, and the actors are such men as we expect to find among our contemporaries. A work should be judged by its execution and its design; and not by any preconceived notion of what it ought to be, according to the critic rather than

the author. It is the drama of literary life, which I would open; it is a narration, or a description; a conversation, or a monologue; an incident, or a scene.

It is not presumed that any single man of genius will resemble every man of genius; for not only man differs from man, but varies from himself in the stages of human life. All that I assert is, that every man of genius will discover, soon or late, that he belongs to the brotherhood of his class, and cannot escape from certain habits, and feelings, and disorders arising from the same sympathies, occupying the same situation, and passing through the same moral existence. Whenever we compare men of genius with each other, the history of those who are no more will serve as a perpetual commentary on our contemporaries. There are, indeed, secret feelings which their silence

conceals, or their fears obscure, or their modesty shrinks from, or their pride rejects; but I have sometimes imagined that I have held the clue, as they have lost themselves in their own labyrinth. I know that many, and some of great celebrity, have sympathised with the feelings which inspired these volumes; nor have I less studied the habits and the characteristics of the lovers of literature.

Perhaps, I have sometimes too warmly apologised for the infirmities of men of genius. From others we may hourly learn to treat with levity the man of genius, because he is *only* such. Perhaps, too, I may have been too fond of the subject, which has been for me an old and a favourite one; I may have exalted the literary character to a degree beyond the scale by which society is willing to try it. I may somewhat resemble that professor

of equestrian celebrity, who had so continually practised the most skilful manœuvres of the *manege*, that with him, "no earthly thing bred such wonder as to be a good horseman;" and had so affectionately contemplated on the peerless object of his fame, that Sir Philip Sidney tells us, "had I not been a piece of a logician before I came to him, I think he would have persuaded me to have wished myself a horse. But thus much," adds that fine genius, "he drove into me, that self-love is better than any gilding to make that seem gorgeous wherein ourselves be parties." This, indeed, is the result of pursuing, as our favourite study, a subject delightful in itself; it is dwelt on till attention magnifies like a microscope, and shows us a thousand things concealed from an observer less interested than ourselves; there may be a little enthusiasm in this, for

it is even experienced by the historian of butterflies; but the pleasing errors of such enthusiasts only confirm the truths they are inculcating, the sensations they have multiplied, and the intensity of their perceptions; and if they sometimes suffer their imagination to magnify or to embellish parts which appear more obvious and common, it will be often found that it is only a new, but not a false association of their feelings.

To the first Critic of the age, who with unwearying kindness overlooked these volumes as they were passing through the press, let me be allowed to express my gratitude; his hand has often lent a polish to my unequal page!

CONTENTS

OF

VOL. I.

CHAPTER I.

Of literary characters, and of the lovers of literature and art . . . . . Page 1

CHAPTER II.

Of the adversaries of literary men among themselves—Matter-of-fact men, and men of wit—The political economists—Of those who abandon their studies—Men in office—The arbiters of public opinion—Those who treat the pursuits of literature with levity 7

CHAPTER III.

Of artists, in the history of men of literary genius—Their habits and pursuits analogous—The nature of their genius is similar in their distinct works—Shown by their parallel æras, and by a common end pursued by both . 23

CHAPTER IV.

Of natural genius—Minds constitutionally different cannot have an equal aptitude—Genius not the result of habit and education—Originates in peculiar qualities of the mind—The predisposition of genius—The "white-paper system" enlarged by analogy with the soils of the earth 30

CHAPTER V.

Youth of genius—Its first impulses may be judged by its subsequent actions—Parents have another association of the man of genius than we—Of genius, its first habits—Its melancholy—Its reveries—Its love of solitude—its disposition to repose—Of a youth distinguished by his equals—Feebleness of its first attempts—Of genius not discoverable even in manhood—The education of the youth may not be that of his genius—An unsettled impulse, querulous till it finds its true occupation—With some, curiosity as intense a faculty as invention—What the youth first applies to is commonly his delight afterwards—Facts of the decisive character of genius Page 46

CHAPTER VI.

The first studies—The self-educated are marked by stubborn peculiarities—Their errors—Their improvement from the neglect or contempt they incur—The history of self-education in Moses Mendelsohn—Friends usually prejudicial in the youth of genius—A remarkable interview between Petrarch in his first studies, and his literary adviser—Exhortation 99

CHAPTER VII.

Of the irritability of genius—Genius in society often in a state of suffering—Equality of temper more prevalent among men of letters—Of the occupation of making a great name—Anxieties of the most successful—Of the inventors—Writers of learning—Writers of taste—Artists 132

CHAPTER VIII.

The spirit of literature and the spirit of society—The inventors—Society offers seduction and not reward to men of genius—The notions of persons of fashion of men of genius—The habitudes of the man of genius distinct from those of the man of society—Study, meditation, and enthusiasm, is the progress of genius—The disagreement between the men of the world and the literary character Page 176

CHAPTER IX.

Conversations of men of genius—Their deficient agreeableness may result from qualities which conduce to their greatness—Slow-minded men not the dullest—The conversationists not the ablest writers—Their true excellence in conversation consists of associations with their pursuits 200

CHAPTER X.

Literary solitude—Its necessity—Its pleasures—Of visitors by profession—Its inconveniences . . 223

CHAPTER XI.

The meditations of genius—A work on the art of meditation not yet produced—Predisposing the mind—Imagination awakens imagination—Generating feelings by music—Slight habits—Darkness and silence, in suspending the exercise of our senses, increase the vivacity of our conceptions—The arts of memory—Memory the foundation of genius—Inventions by several to preserve their own

moral and literary character—And to assist their studies —The meditations of genius depend on habit—Of the night-time—A day of meditation should precede a day of composition—Works of magnitude from slight conceptions —Of thoughts never written—The art of meditation exercised at all hours and places—Continuity of attention the source of philosophical discoveries—Stillness of meditation is the first state of existence in genius. Page 237

ON THE

LITERARY CHARACTER.

CHAPTER I.

OF LITERARY CHARACTERS, AND OF THE LOVERS OF LITERATURE AND ART.

DIFFUSED over enlightened Europe, an order of men has arisen, who, uninfluenced by the interests or the passions which give an impulse to the other classes of society, are connected by the secret links of congenial pursuits, and, insensibly to themselves, are combining in the same common labours, and participating in the same divided glory. In the metropolitan cities of Europe the same authors are now read, and the same opinions become established: the Englishman is familiar with Machiavel and Montesquieu; the Italian and the Frenchman

with Bacon and Locke; and the same smiles and tears are awakened on the banks of the Thames, of the Seine, or of the Guadalquivir, by Shakespeare, Moliere, and Cervantes.

> Contemporains de tous les hommes,
> Et citoyens de tous les lieux.

A khan of Tartary admired the wit of Moliere, and discovered the Tartuffe in the Crimea; and had this ingenious sovereign survived the translation which he ordered, the immortal labour of the comic satirist of France might have laid the foundations of good taste even among the Turks and the Tartars. We see the Italian Pignotti referring to the opinion of an English critic, Lord Bolingbroke, for decisive authority on the peculiar characteristics of the historian Guicciardini: the German Schlegel writes on our Shakespeare like a patriot. Such is the wide and the perpetual influence of this living intercourse of literary minds!

Scarcely have two centuries elapsed since the literature of every nation was limited to its fatherland, and men of genius could only hope for the

spread of their fame in the single language of ancient Rome; which for them had ceased to be natural, and could never be popular. It was in the intercourse of the wealth, the power, and the novel arts of the nations of Europe, that they learnt each others' languages; and they discovered, that however their manners varied as they arose from their different customs, they participated in the same intellectual faculties, suffered from the same wants, and were alive to the same pleasures; they perceived that there were no conventional fashions, nor national distinctions in abstract truths and fundamental knowledge. A new spirit seems to bring them nearer to each other; and as if literary Europe were intent to form but one people out of the populace of mankind, they offer their reciprocal labours; they pledge to each other the same opinions; and that knowledge which, like a small river, takes its source from one spot, at length mingles with that "ocean-stream" common to them all.

But those who stand connected with this literary community are not always sensible of the kindred

alliance; even a genius of the first order has not always been aware that he is the founder of a society, and that there will ever be a brotherhood where there is a father-genius.

These literary characters are partially, and with a melancholy colouring, exhibited by JOHNSON. "To talk in private, to think in solitude, to inquire or to answer inquiries, is the business of a scholar. He wanders about the world without pomp or terror; and is neither known nor valued but by men like himself." Thus thought this great writer during those sad probationary years of genius, when

"Slow rises worth, by *poverty* depress'd;"

not yet conscious that he himself was devoting his days to cast the minds of his contemporaries and of the succeeding age in the mighty mould of his own; for JOHNSON was of that order of men whose individual genius becomes that of a people. A prouder conception rose in the majestic mind of MILTON of "that lasting fame and perpetuity of praise which God and good men have consented

shall be the reward of those whose PUBLISHED LABOURS advance the good of mankind."

The LITERARY CHARACTER is a denomination which, however vague, defines the pursuits of the individual, and separates him from other professions, although it frequently occurs that he is himself a member of one. Professional characters are modified by the change of manners, and are usually national; while the literary character, from the objects in which it concerns itself, retains a more permanent, and necessarily a more independent nature.

Formed by the same habits, and influenced by the same motives, notwithstanding the contrast of talents and tempers, and the remoteness of times and places, the literary character has ever preserved among its followers the most striking family resemblance. The passion for study, the delight in books, the desire of solitude and celebrity, the obstructions of human life, the character of their pursuits, the uniformity of their habits, the triumphs and the disappointments of literary glory, were as truly described by CICERO and the younger PLINY

as by PETRARCH and ERASMUS, and as they have been by HUME and GIBBON. And such too is that noble passion of the lovers of literature and of art for collecting together their mingled treasures; a thirst as insatiable in ATTICUS and PEIRESC as in our CRACHERODE and TOWNLEY*. We trace the feelings of our literary contemporaries in all ages, and among every people who have ranked with nations far advanced in civilization; such are the great artificers of knowledge, and such those who preserve unbroken the vast chain of human acquisitions. The one have stamped the images of their minds on their works, and the others have preserved the circulation of this intellectual coinage, this

> ——————— Gold of the dead,
> Which Time does still disperse, but not devour.

* For the character of these MEN OF LETTERS, see the chapter under that head.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE ADVERSARIES OF LITERARY MEN AMONG THEMSELVES—MATTER-OF-FACT MEN, AND MEN OF WIT—THE POLITICAL ECONOMISTS—OF THOSE WHO ABANDON THEIR STUDIES—MEN IN OFFICE—THE ARBITERS OF PUBLIC OPINION—THOSE WHO TREAT THE PURSUITS OF LITERATURE WITH LEVITY.

THE pursuits of literature have been openly or insidiously lowered by those literary men who, from motives not always difficult to penetrate, are eager to confound the ranks in the republic of letters, maliciously conferring the honours of authorship on that "Ten Thousand" whose recent list is not so much a muster-roll of heroes, as a table of population *.

* See a recent Dictionary of "Ten Thousand living Authors" of our own nation. The alphabet is fatal by its juxta-positions. In France, before the revolution, they counted about twenty thousand writers. When David would have his people numbered, Joab asked,

Matter-of-fact men, or men of knowledge, and men of wit and taste, were long inimical to each others' pursuits*. The Royal Society in its origin could hardly support itself from the ludicrous attacks of literary men†, and the Antiquarian Society

"why doth my lord delight in this?" In political economy, the population returns may be useful, provided they be correct; but in the literary republic, its numerical force diminishes the strength of the empire. "There you are numbered, we had rather you were weighed." Put aside the puling infants of literature, of whom such a mortality occurs in its nurseries; such as the writers of the single sermon, the single law-tract, the single medical dissertation, &c.; all writers whose subject is single, without being singular; count for nothing the inefficient mob of mediocrists, and strike out our literary *charlatans;* and then our alphabet of men of genius will not consist, as it is now, of the four and twenty letters.

* The cause is developed in the chapter on *Want of mutual Esteem.*

† See BUTLER, in his "Elephant in the Moon." SOUTH, in his oration at the opening of the theatre at Oxford, passed this bitter sarcasm on the naturalists, "*Mirantur nihil nisi pulices, pediculos—et se ipsos:*" nothing they admire but fleas, lice, and themselves! The illustrious SLOANE endured a long persecution

has afforded them amusement. Such partial views have ceased to contract the understanding; science yields a new substance to literature; literature combines new associations for the votaries of knowledge. There is no subject in nature, and in the history of man, which will not associate with our feelings and our curiosity, whenever genius extends its awakening hand. The antiquary, the naturalist, the architect, the chemist, and even writers on medical topics, have in our days asserted their claims, and discovered their long-interrupted

from the bantering humour of Dr. KING. One of the most amusing declaimers against what he calls *les Sciences des faux Sçavans* is Father MALEBRANCHE; he is far more severe than Cornelius Agrippa, and he long preceded ROUSSEAU, so famous for his invective against the sciences. The seventh chapter of his fourth book is an inimitable satire. "The principal excuse," says he, "which engages men in *false studies*, is, that they have attached the *idea of learned* where they should not." Astronomy, antiquarianism, history, ancient poetry, and natural history, are all mowed down by his metaphysical scythe. When we become acquainted with the *idea* Father Malebranche attaches to the term *learned*, we understand him—and we smile.

relationship with the great family of genius and literature.

A new race of jargonists, the barbarous metaphysicians of political economy, have struck at the essential existence of the productions of genius in literature and art; for, appreciating them by their own standard, they have miserably degraded the professors. Absorbed in the contemplation of material objects, and rejecting whatever does not enter into their own restricted notion of "utility," these cold arithmetical seers, with nothing but millions in their imagination, and whose choicest works of art are spinning-jennies, have valued the intellectual tasks of the library and the *studio* by "the demand and the supply." They have sunk these pursuits into the class of what they term "unproductive labour," and by another result of their line and level system, men of letters, with some other important characters, are forced down into the class "of buffoons, singers, opera dancers, &c." In a system of political economy it has been discovered, that "that *unprosperous race* of men, called *men of*

letters, must *necessarily* occupy their *present forlorn state* in society, much as formerly, when a scholar and a beggar seem to have been terms very nearly synonymous*." In their commercial, agricultural, and manufacturing view of human nature, addressing society by its most pressing wants and its coarsest feelings, they limit the moral and physical existence of man by speculative tables of population, planing and levelling society down in their carpentry of human nature. They would yoke and harness the loftier spirits to one common and vulgar destination. Man is considered only as he wheels on the wharf, or as he spins in the factory; but man, as a recluse being of meditation, or impelled to action by more generous passions, has been struck out of the system of our political economists. It is however only among their "unproductive labourers," that we shall find those men of leisure, whose habitual pursuits are consumed in the development of thought, and the gradual accessions of knowledge; those men of whom the sage of Judea declares, that "It is he who hath

* Wealth of Nations, i. 182.

little business who shall become wise: how can he get wisdom that holdeth the plough, and whose talk is of bullocks? But THEY,"—the men of leisure and study,—" WILL MAINTAIN THE STATE OF THE WORLD!"

Political economists may form another notion of the literary character whenever they shall feel—a calculation of time which who would venture to furnish them with?—that the prosperity and the happiness of a people include something more evident and more permanent than " the Wealth of a Nation*."

* Since this murmur has been uttered against the degrading views of some of those theorists, it afforded me pleasure to observe, that Mr. Malthus has fully sanctioned its justness. On this head, at least, Mr. Malthus has amply confuted his stubborn and tasteless brothers. Alluding to the productions of genius, this writer observes, that " to estimate the value of NEWTON's discoveries, or the delight communicated by SHAKESPEARE and MILTON, by the *price* at which their works have sold, would be but a poor measure of the degree in which they have elevated and enchanted their country." Principles of Pol. Econ. p. 48. And hence he acknowledges, that "*some unproductive labour is of much more use and importance* than pro-

A more formidable class of men of genius are heartless to the interests of literature: like CORNELIUS AGRIPPA, who wrote on "the vanity of the arts and sciences," many of these are only tracing in the arts which they have abandoned their own inconstant tempers, their feeble tastes, and their disordered judgments. But with others of this class, study has usually served as the instrument, not as the object, of their ascent; it was the ladder

ductive labour, but is incapable of being the subject of the gross calculations which relate to national wealth; contributing to *other sources of happiness* besides those which are derived from matter." Political economists would have smiled with contempt on the querulous PORSON, who once observed, that "it seemed to him very hard, that with all his critical knowledge of Greek, he could not get a hundred pounds." They would have demonstrated to the learned Grecian, that this was just as it ought to be; the same occurrence had even happened to HOMER in his own country, where Greek ought to have fetched a higher price than in England; but, that both might have obtained this hundred pounds, had the Grecian bard and the Greek professor been employed at the same stocking-frame together, instead of the Iliad.

which they once climbed, but it was not that eastern star which guided and inspired. Such literary characters were WARBURTON, WATSON, and WILKES, who abandoned their studies when these had served a purpose. I have elsewhere developed that secret principle which conducted and terminated the views of that extraordinary man of genius, Bishop WARBURTON*.

WATSON gave up his pursuits in chemistry the instant he obtained their limited reward, and the laboratory closed when the professorship was instituted. Such was the penurious love he bore for the science which he had adopted, that the extraordinary discoveries of thirty years subsequent to his own first essays could never excite even an idle inquiry. He tells us that he preferred "his larches to his laurels:" the wretched jingle expressed the worldliness that dictated it. In the same spirit of calculation with which he had at first embraced science and literature, he abandoned them; and his ingenuous confession is a memorable example

* Quarrels of Authors, vol. i.

of that egotistic pride which betrayed in the literary character the creature of selfism and political ambition.

We are accustomed to consider WILKES merely as a political adventurer, and it may surprise to find this "city chamberlain" ranked among professed literary characters; yet in his variable life there was a period when he cherished the aspirations of a votary Once he desired Lloyd to announce the edition of Churchill, which he designed to enrich by a commentary; and his correspondence on this subject, which has never appeared, he himself tells us would afford a variety of hints and communications. WILKES was then warmed by literary glory; for on his retirement into Italy, he declared, "I mean to give myself entirely to our friend's work, and to my History of England. I wish to equal the dignity of Livy: I am sure the greatness and majesty of our nation demand an historian equal to him." They who have only heard of the intriguing demagogue, and witnessed the last days of the used voluptuary, may hardly imagine that WILKES had ever cherished

such elevated projects; but mob-politics made this adventurer's fortune, which fell to the lot of an epicurean: the literary glory he once sought he lived to ridicule, when he observed the immortal diligence of Lord Chatham and of Gibbon. Dissolving life away in the *delices* of the table, and consuming all his feelings on himself, WILKES left his nearest relatives what he left the world—the memory of an anti-social being! This wit, who has bequeathed to us no wit; this man of genius, who has formed no work of genius; this bold advocate for popular freedom, who sunk his patriotism in the chamberlainship; was indeed desirous of leaving behind him some trace of the life of an *escroc*, in a piece of autobiography, which, for the benefit of the world, has been thrown to the flames.

Men who have ascended into office through its gradations, or have been thrown upwards by accident, are apt to view others in a cloud of passions and politics. They who once commanded us by their eloquence, come at length to suspect the eloquent; and in their "pride of office," would now drive us by that single force of despotism which is the cor-

ruption of political power. Our late great minister, Pitt, has been reproached even by his friends for that contemptuous indifference with which he treated literary men. Perhaps BURKE himself, long a literary character, might incur some portion of this censure, by involving the character itself in the odium of a monstrous political sect. Such political characters resemble Adrian VI., who obtaining the tiara as the reward of his studies, afterwards persecuted literary men, and, say the Italians, dreaded lest his brothers might shake the pontificate itself *.

* It has been suspected that Adrian VI. has been calumniated. Mr. Duppa, in his life of Michael Angelo, thinks that this pontiff was only eager but too sudden to begin that reform he meditated. But Adrian VI. was a scholastic whose austerity turned away with contempt from all ancient art, and was no brother to contemporary genius. Guicciardini calls Adrian "a barbarian," in allusion however only to his birth; a Fleming. He was one of the *cui bono* race, a branch of our political economists. Desirous of repairing the wasted treasury left by the dissolute Leo X., the honesty of our "barbarian" is less questionable than his taste. Yet in the history of literature and the arts, we cannot deem highly of a prince, who, when they showed him the

Worse fares it with authors when minds of this cast become the arbiters of public opinion; for the greatest of writers may unquestionably be forced into ridiculous attitudes, by the well-known artifices practised by modern criticism. The elephant, no longer in his forest struggling with his hunters, but falling entrapped by a paltry snare, comes at length, in the height of ill-fortune, to dance on heated iron at the bidding of the pantaloon of a fair. Whatever such critics may plead to mortify the vanity of authors, at least it requires as much to give effect to their own polished effrontery*.

Laocoon, silenced their raptures by the frigid observation, that all such things were *idola antiquorum;* and ridiculed the *amena lettaratura* till every man of genius retreated from his court. Had Adrian's reign extended beyond its brief period, men of taste in their panic imagined that in his zeal the Pontiff would have calcined the fine statues of ancient art, to expedite the edifice of St. Peter.

* Listen to a confession and a recantation of an illustrious sinner; the Coryphæus of the amusing and new-found art, or artifice, of modern criticism. In the character of BURNS, the Edinburgh Reviewer, with his peculiar felicity of manner, attacked the character of the man of genius; but when Mr. Campbell vindicated his

Scorn, sarcasm, and invective, the egotism of the vain, and the irascibility of the petulant, where immortal brother with all the inspiration of the family feeling, our critic, who is one of those great artists who acquire at length the utmost indifference even for their own works, generously avowed, that, "a certain tone of exaggeration is incidental *we fear to the sort of writing in which we are engaged.* Reckoning a little too much on the dulness of our readers, we are often led to *overstate our sentiments;* when a little *controversial warmth* is added to a little *love of effect,* an excess of colouring steals over the canvass, which ultimately offends no eye so much as our own." But what if this *love of effect* in the critic has been too often obtained at the entire cost of the literary characters the fruits of whose studious days at this moment lie withering in oblivion, or whose genius the critic has deterred from pursuing the career it had opened for itself! To have silenced the learned, and to have terrified the modest, is the barbarous triumph of a Hun or a Vandal; and the vaunted freedom of the literary republic departed from us, when the vacillating public blindly consecrated the edicts of the demagogues of literature, whoever they may be.

A reaction appears in the burlesque or bantering spirit; while one faction drives out another, the abuse of extraordinary powers is equally fatal; thus we are consoled while we are afflicted, and we are protected while we are degraded.

they succeed in debilitating genius of the c sciousness of its powers, are practising the witch of that ancient superstition of "tying the kn which threw the youthful bridegroom into u despair by its ideal forcefulness*.

That spirit of levity which would shake columns of society, and cast aside the moral lev of human nature, by detracting from or burlesqu the elevating principles which have produced many illustrious men, has reeently attempted reduce the labours of literature to a mere curi amusement: a finished composition is likened t skilful game of billiards or a piece of music fin executed, and curious researches to charades a other insignificant puzzles. With such, an auth is an idler who will not be idle, amusing or tiguing others who are completely so. The sult of a work of genius is contracted to the of writing; but this art is only its last perfectio

* *Nouer l'aiguillette,* of which the extraordina effect is described by Montaigne, is an Oriental cust still practised.—*Mr. Hobhouse's Journey through A bania,* p. 528.

Inspiration is drawn from a deeper source, enthusiasm is diffused through contagious pages, and without these movements of genius, how poor and artificial a thing is this electrical composition, however it flashes with the cold vibrations of the art! We have been recently told, on critical authority, that "a great genius should never allow himself to be sensible to his own celebrity, nor deem his pursuits of much consequence, however important or successful." A sort of catholic doctrine, to mortify an author into a saint, extinguishing the glorious appetite of fame by one Lent all the year, and self-flagellation every day! BUFFON and GIBBON, VOLTAIRE and POPE, who gave to literature all the cares, the industry, and the glory of their lives, assuredly were too "sensible to their celebrity, and deemed their pursuits of much consequence," particularly when "important and successful." But this point may be adjusted when we shall come to examine that self-possession of those authors who sustain their own genius by a sense of their own glory.

Such, then, are some of the domestic treasons of the literary character against literature—"Et tu, Brute!" but a true hero of literature outlives his assassins, and might address them in that language of poetry and affection with which a Mexican king reproached his traitorous counsellors: "You were the feathers of my wings, and the eyelids of my eyes."

CHAPTER III.

OF ARTISTS, IN THE HISTORY OF MEN OF LITERARY GENIUS—THEIR HABITS AND PURSUITS ANALOGOUS—THE NATURE OF THEIR GENIUS IS SIMILAR IN THEIR DISTINCT WORKS—SHOWN BY THEIR PARALLEL ÆRAS, AND BY A COMMON END PURSUED BY BOTH.

ARTISTS and literary men, alike insulated in their studies, pass through the same permanent discipline; and thus it has happened that the same habits and feelings, and the same fortunes, have accompanied men who have sometimes unhappily imagined that their pursuits were not analogous.

> Let the artist share
> The palm; he shares the peril, and dejected
> Faints o'er the labour unapproved—alas!
> Despair and genius!—

The congenial histories of literature and art describe the same periodical revolutions and parallel æras. After the golden age of Latinity, we

gradually slide into the silver, and at length precipitately descend into the iron: in the history of painting, after the splendid epoch of Raphael, Titian, and Corregio, we meet with pleasure the Carraccis, Domenichino, Guido, and Albani, as we read Paterculus, Quintilian, Seneca, Juvenal, and Silius Italicus, after their immortal masters, Cicero, Livy, Virgil, and Horace.

It is therefore evident that MILTON, MICHAEL ANGELO, and HANDEL, belong to the same order of minds; the same imaginative powers, and the same sensibility, are only operating with different materials. LANZI, the delightful historian of the *Storia Pittorica*, is prodigal of his comparisons of the painters with the poets; his delicacy of perception discerned the refined analogies which for ever unite the two sisters, and he fondly dwelt on the transplanted flowers of the two arts: "*Chi sente che sia Tibullo nel poetare sente chi sia Andrea* (*del Sarto*) *nel dipingere.*" He who feels what TIBULLUS is in poetry, feels what ANDREA is in painting. MICHAEL ANGELO, from his profound conception of the terrible and the difficult in art,

was called its DANTE: from the Italian poet the Italian sculptor derived the grandeur of his ideas; and indeed the visions of the bard had deeply nourished his imagination; for once he had poured about the margins of his own copy their ethereal inventions, in the rapid designs of his pen. And so Bellori informs us of a very curious volume in manuscript, composed by RUBENS, which contained, among other topics concerning art, descriptions of the passions and actions of men, drawn from the poets, and demonstrated to the eye by the painters. Here were battles, shipwrecks, sports, groups, and other incidents which were transcribed from Virgil and other poets, and by their side RUBENS had copied what he had met with on those subjects from Raphael and the antique.

The poet and the painter are only truly great by the mutual influences of their studies, and the jealousy of glory has only produced an idle contest. This old family quarrel for precedence has been of late renewed by Mr. Shee in his brilliant "Rhymes on Art;" where he maintains that "the narrative of an action is not comparable to the action itself

before the eyes:" while the enthusiast BARRY considers painting as "poetry realised." This error of genius, perhaps first caught from Richardson's bewildering pages, was strengthened by the extravagant principle adopted by DARWIN, who, to exalt his solitary talent of descriptive poetry, asserted that "the essence of poetry was picture." The philosophical critic will find no difficulty in assigning to each sister-art her distinct province; and it is only a pleasing delirium, in the enthusiasm of artists, which has confused the boundaries of these arts. The dread pathetic story of Dante's Ugolino, under the plastic hand of Michael Angelo, formed the subject of a basso-relievo, and Reynolds, with his highest effort, embodied the terrific conception of the poet as much as his art permitted; but assuredly both these great artists would never have claimed the precedence of the Dantesc genius, and might have hesitated at the rivalry.

Who has not heard of that one common principle which unites the intellectual arts, and who has not felt that the nature of their genius is similar in

their distinct works? Hence curious inquirers could never decide whether the group of the Laocoon in sculpture preceded or was borrowed from that in poetry. Lessing conjectures that the sculptor copied the poet. It is evident that the agony of Laocoon was the common end where the sculptor and the poet were to meet; and we may observe that the artists in marble and in verse skilfully adapted their variations to their respective arts: the one having to prefer the *nude*, rejected the veiling fillet from the forehead, that he might not conceal its deep expression, and the drapery of the sacrificial robe, that he might display the human form in visible agony; but the other, by the charm of verse, could invest the priest with the pomp of the pontifical robe without hiding from us the interior sufferings of the human victim. We see they obtained by different means, adapted to their respective arts, that common end which each designed; but who will decide which invention preceded the other, or who was the greater artist?

This approximation of men apparently of op-

posite pursuits is so natural, that when GESNER, in his inspiring letter on landscape-painting, recommends to the young painter a constant study of poetry and literature, the impatient artist is made to exclaim, "Must we combine with so many other studies those which belong to literary men? Must we read as well as paint?" "It is useless to reply to this question; for some important truths must be instinctively felt, perhaps the fundamental ones in the arts." A truly imaginative artist, whose enthusiasm was never absent when he meditated on the art he loved, BARRY, thus vehemently broke forth: "Go home from the academy, light up your lamps, and exercise yourselves in the creative part of your art, with Homer, with Livy, and all the great characters ancient and modern, for your companions and counsellors." This genial intercourse of literature with art may be proved by painters who have suggested subjects to poets, and poets who have selected them for painters. GOLDSMITH gave the subject of the tragic and pathetic picture of Ugolino to the pencil of REYNOLDS.

All the classes of men in society have their peculiar sorrows and enjoyments, as they have their habits and characteristics. In the history of men of genius we may often open the secret story of their minds, for they have above others the privilege of communicating their own feelings; and every life of a man of genius, composed by himself, presents us with the experimental philosophy of the mind. By living with their brothers, and contemplating on their masters, they will judge from consciousness less erroneously than from discussion; and in forming comparative views and parallel situations, they will discover certain habits and feelings, and find these reflected in themselves.

SYDENHAM has beautifully said, whoever describes a violet exactly as to its colour, taste, smell, form, and other properties, will find the description agree in most particulars with all the violets in the universe.

CHAPTER IV.

OF NATURAL GENIUS—MINDS CONSTITUTIONALLY DIFFERENT CANNOT HAVE AN EQUAL APTITUDE—GENIUS NOT THE RESULT OF HABIT AND EDUCATION—ORIGINATES IN PECULIAR QUALITIES OF THE MIND—THE PREDISPOSITION OF GENIUS—THE "WHITE-PAPER SYSTEM" ENLARGED BY ANALOGY WITH THE SOILS OF THE EARTH*.

THAT faculty in art which individualises the artist, belonging to him and to no other, and in a work forms that creative part whose likeness is not found in any other work,—is it inherent in the con-

* In the second edition of this work in 1818, I touched on some points of this inquiry in the second chapter: I almost despaired to find any philosopher sympathise with the subject, so invulnerable, they imagine, are the entrenchments of their theories. I was agreeably surprised to find these ideas taken up in the Edinburgh Review for August, 1820, in an entertaining article on Reynolds. I have, no doubt, profited by the perusal, though this chapter was prepared before I met with that spirited vindication of "an inherent difference in the organs or faculties to receive impressions of any kind."

stitutional dispositions of the individual, or can it be formed by patient acquisition?

Astonished at their own silent and obscure progress, some have imagined that they had formed their genius solely by their own studies: when they acquired, they conceived that they had generated; and losing the distinction between nature and habit, with fatal temerity the idolatry of philosophy substituted something visible and palpable, yet shaped by the most opposite fancies, called a Theory—for Nature herself! Men of genius, whose great occupation is to be conversant with the inspirations of nature, made up a factitious one among themselves, and assumed that they could operate without the intervention of the occult original. But Nature would not be mocked; and whenever this race of idolaters have worked without her agency, she, who is so genial in all her own productions, invariably afflicts the votaries who do not feel her influence with the most stubborn sterility.

Theories of genius are the peculiar constructions of our own philosophical times: ages of genius

had passed away, and they left no other record than their works; no preconcerted theory described the workings of the imagination to be without imagination, nor did they venture to teach how to invent invention.

The character of genius, viewed as the effect of habit and education, on the principle of the equality of the human mind, infers that men have an equal aptitude for the work of genius: a paradox which, with a more fatal one, came from the French school, and arose probably from an equivocal expression.

Locke employed the well-known comparison of the mind with "white paper void of all characters," to free his famous "Inquiry" from that powerful obstacle to his system, the absurd belief of "innate ideas," of notions of objects before objects were presented to observation. Our philosopher considered that this simple analogy sufficiently described the manner in which he conceived the impressions of the senses write themselves on the mind. His French pupils, the amusing Helvetius, or Diderot, for they were equally concerned in the paradoxical "L'Esprit," inferred that this blank

paper served also as an evidence that men had *an equal aptitude for genius*, just as the blank paper reflects to us whatever characters we trace on it. This *equality of minds* gave rise to the same monstrous doctrine in the science of metaphysics which that of another verbal misconception, *the equality of men*, did in that of politics. The Scottish metaphysicians powerfully combined to illustrate the mechanism of the mind,—an important and a curious truth; for as rules and principles exist in the nature of things, and when discovered are only thence drawn out, genius unconsciously conducts itself by an uniform process; and when this process had been traced, they inferred that what was done by some men, under the influence of fundamental laws which regulate the march of the intellect, must also be in the reach of others, who, in the same circumstances, apply themselves to the same study. But these metaphysicians resemble anatomists, under whose knife all men are alike: they know the structure of the bones, the movement of the muscles, and where the connecting ligaments lie; but the invisible principle of life

flies from their touch: it is the practitioner on the living body who studies in every individual that peculiarity of constitution which forms the idiosyncrasy.

Under the influence of such novel theories of genius, JOHNSON defined it as "A Mind of large general powers ACCIDENTALLY determined by some *particular direction*." On this principle we must infer that the reasoning LOCKE, or the arithmetical DE MOIVRE, without an ear or an eye in which pure imagination was concerned, could have been the musical and fairy SPENSER *. This conception of the nature of genius became prevalent; it induced the philosophical BECCARIA to

* It is more dangerous to define than to describe; a dry definition excludes so much, an ardent description at once appeals to our sympathies. How much more comprehensible our great critic becomes, when he nobly describes genius, "as the power of mind that collects, combines, amplifies, and animates; the energy without which judgment is cold, and knowledge is inert." And it is this POWER OF MIND, this primary faculty and native aptitude, which we deem may exist separately from education and habit, since these often do without genius.

assert that every individual had an equal degree of genius for poetry and eloquence; it runs through the philosophy of the elegant Dugald Stewart; and REYNOLDS, the pupil of Johnson in literature, adopting the paradox, constructed his automatic system on this principle of *equal aptitude*. He says, "this excellence, however expressed by genius, taste, or the gift of Heaven, I am confident may be *acquired*." Reynolds had the modesty to fancy that so many rivals, unendowed by nature, might have equalled the magic of his own pencil: but his theory of industry, so essential to genius, yet so useless without it, too long stimulated the drudges of art, and left us without a Corregio or a Raphael! Another man of genius caught the fever of the new system. CURRIE, in his eloquent Life of Burns, swells out the scene of genius to a startling magnificence; for he asserts, that "the talents necessary to the construction of an Iliad, under different discipline and application, might have led armies to victory or kingdoms to prosperity, might have wielded the thunder of eloquence, or discovered and en-

larged the sciences." All this we find in the *text*; but in the clear intellect of this man of genius a vast number of intervening difficulties started up, and in a copious *note* the numerous exceptions show that the assumed theory requires no other refutation than what the theorist has himself so abundantly and so judiciously supplied. There is something ludicrous in the result of a theory of genius which would place HOBBES and ERASMUS, those timid and learned recluses, to open a campaign with the military invention and physical intrepidity of a Marlborough, or conclude that the romantic bard of the "Fairy Queen," amidst the quickly-shifting scenes of his visionary reveries, could have deduced, by slow and patient watchings of the mind, the system and the demonstrations of Newton.

Such theorists deduce the faculty called genius from a variety of exterior or secondary causes; zealously rejecting the notion that genius may originate in constitutional dispositions, and be only a mode of the individual's existence, they deny that minds are differently constituted. Habit and

education, being more palpable and visible in their operations, and progressive in the development of the intellectual faculties, have been imagined fully sufficient to make genius a subject of acquirement.

But when these theorists had discovered the curious fact, that we have owed to *accident* several men of genius, and when they laid open some sources which influenced genius in its progress, they did not go one step further, and inquire whether such sources and such accidents had ever supplied the *want of genius* in the individual? Effects were here again mistaken for causes. Could Spenser have kindled a poet in Cowley, Richardson a painter in Reynolds, and Descartes a metaphysician in Malebranche, if those master-minds, pointed out as having been such from *accident*, had not first received the indelible mint-stamp struck by the hand of Nature, and which, to give it a name, we may be allowed to call the *predisposition* of genius? The *accidents* so triumphantly held forth, which are imagined to have created the genius of these men, have oc-

curred to a thousand who have run the same career; but how does it happen that the multitude remain a multitude, and the man of genius arrives alone at the goal?

This theory, which long dazzled its beholders, was in time found to stand in contradiction with itself, but perpetually with their own experience. Reynolds pared down his decision in the progress of his lectures, often wavered, often altered, and grew more confused as he lived longer to look about him*. The infirm race of the new philo-

* I transcribe the last opinions of Mr. Edgeworth. "As to original genius, and the effect of education in forming taste or directing talent, the last revisal of his opinions was given by himself in the introduction to the second edition of Professional Education. He was strengthened in his belief, that many of the great differences of intellect which appear in men, depend more upon the early cultivating the habit of attention than upon any disparity between the powers of one individual than another. Perhaps, he latterly allowed that there is more difference than he had formerly admitted between the *natural powers* of different persons; but not so great as is generally supposed."—*Edgeworth's Memoirs*, ii. 388.

sophy, with all their sources of genius open before them, went on multiplying mediocrity, while great genius, true to nature, was preserving all its rarity, its solitary independence.

Others have strenuously denied that we are born with any peculiar species of mind, and resolve the mysterious problem into *capacity*, of which men only differ in the degree. They can perceive no distinction between the poetical and the mathematical genius; and they conclude that a man of genius, possessing a general capacity, may become whatever he chooses, but is determined by his first acquired habit to be what he is*.

In substituting the term *capacity* for that of

* Johnson once asserted, that "the supposition of one man having more imagination, another more judgment, is not true; it is only one man has *more mind* than another. He who has vigour, may walk to the east as well as the west, if he happens to turn his head that way." Once, perhaps, not now, Mr. Godwin was persuaded that all genius is a mere *acquisition*, for he hints at "infusing it," and making it a thing "heritable." A reversion which has been missed by the many respectable dunces who have been sons of men of genius.

genius, the origin or nature remains equally occult. How is it acquired, or how is it inherent? To assert that any man of genius may become what he wills, those must fervently protest against who feel that the character of genius is such that it cannot be other than it is; that there is an identity of minds, and that there exists an interior conformity as marked and as perfect as the exterior physiognomy. A Scotch metaphysician has recently declared that "Locke or Newton might have been as eminent poets as Homer or Milton, had they given themselves early to the study of poetry." It is well to know how far this taste will go. We believe that had these philosophers obstinately, against nature, persisted in the attempt, as some have unluckily for themselves, we should have lost two great philosophers, and have obtained two supernumerary poets *.

* This very Scotch metaphysician, at the instant he lays down this postulate, acknowledges that "Dr. Beattie had talents for a *poet*, but apparently not for a *philosopher*." It is amusing to learn another result of his ungenial metaphysics. This sage demonstrates

It would be more useful to discover another source of genius for philosophers and poets, less fallible than the gratuitous assumptions of these theorists. An adequate origin for peculiar qualities in the mind may be found in that constitutional or secret propensity which adapts some for particular pursuits, and forms the *predisposition* of genius.

Not that we are bound to demonstrate what our adversaries have failed in proving; we may still remain ignorant of the nature of genius, and yet know they have not told it. The phenomena of *predisposition* in the mind are not more obscure and ambiguous than those which have been assigned as the sources of genius in certain individuals. For is it more difficult to conceive that a

and concludes in these words, "It will therefore be found, with little exception, that *a great poet is but an ordinary genius*." Let this sturdy Scotch metaphysician never approach Pegasus—he has to fear, not his wings, but his heels. If some have written on genius with a great deal too much, others have written without any.

person bears in his constitutional disposition that germ of native aptitude which is developing itself to a predominant character of genius, which breaks forth in the temper and moulds the habits, than to conjecture that these men of genius could not have been such but from *accident*, or that they differ only in their *capacity*?

Every class of men of genius has distinct habits; all poets resemble one other, as all painters and all mathematicians. There is a conformity in the cast of their minds, and the quality of each is distinct from the other, and the very faculty which fits them for one particular pursuit is just the reverse required for another. If these are truisms, as they may appear, we need not demonstrate that from which we only wish to draw our conclusion. Why does this remarkable similarity prevail through the classes of genius? Because each, in their favourite production, is working with the same appropriate organ. The poetical eye is early busied with imagery, and its reveries with passions; as early will the painter's hand be copying forms and colours; the young musician's ear

will wander in the creation of sounds, and the philosopher's head will mature its meditations. It is then the aptitude of the appropriate organ, however it varies in its character, in which genius seems most concerned, and which is connatural and connate with the individual, and, as it was expressed in old days, is *born* with him. There seems no other source of genius; for whenever this has been refused by nature, as it is so often, no theory of genius, neither habit nor education, have ever supplied its want. To discriminate between the *habit* and the *predisposition*, is quite impossible; because whenever great genius discovers itself, as it can only do by continuity, it has become a habit with the individual; it is the fatal notion of habit having the power of generating genius, which has so long served to delude the numerous votaries of mediocrity. Natural or native power is enlarged by art; but the most perfect Art has but narrow limits deprived of natural disposition.

A curious decision on this obscure subject may be drawn from an admirable judge of the nature of

genius. AKENSIDE, in that fine poem which forms its history, tracing its source, sang,

From Heaven my strains begin, from Heaven descends
The flame of genius to *the human breast.*

But in the final revision of that poem, which he left many years after, the bard has vindicated the solitary and independent origin of genius, by the mysterious epithet,

"THE CHOSEN BREAST."

The veteran poet was perhaps lessoned by the vicissitudes of his own poetical life, and those of some of his brothers.

Metaphors are but imperfect illustrations in metaphysical inquiries; usually they include too little or take in too much. Yet fanciful analogies are not willingly abandoned. The iconologists describe Genius as a winged child with a flame above its head; the wings and the flame express more than some metaphysical conclusions. Let me substitute for "the white paper" of Locke, which served the philosopher to describe the operations of the senses on the mind, the soils of the earth; in

them we may discover that variety of primary qualities which we believe exist in human minds. The botanist and the geologist always find the nature of the strata indicative of its productions; the meagre light herbage announces the poverty of the soil it covers, while the luxuriant growth of plants betrays the richness of the matrix in which the roots are fixed. It is scarcely reasoning by analogy to apply this operating principle of nature to the faculties of men.

But while the origin and nature of that faculty which we understand by the term GENIUS remains still wrapt up in its mysterious bud, may we not trace its history in its votaries? If Nature overshadows with her wings her first causes, still the effects lie open before us, and experience and observation will often deduce from consciousness what we cannot from demonstration. If Nature, in some of her great operations, has kept back her last secrets, and even Newton, in the result of his reasonings, has religiously abstained from penetrating into her occult connexions, is it nothing to be her historian, although we cannot be her legislator?

CHAPTER V.

YOUTH OF GENIUS—ITS FIRST IMPULSES MAY BE JUDGED BY ITS SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS—PARENTS HAVE ANOTHER ASSOCIATION OF THE MAN OF GENIUS THAN WE—OF GENIUS, ITS FIRST HABITS—ITS MELANCHOLY—ITS REVERIES—ITS LOVE OF SOLITUDE—ITS DISPOSITION TO REPOSE—OF A YOUTH DISTINGUISHED BY HIS EQUALS—FEEBLENESS OF ITS FIRST ATTEMPTS—OF GENIUS NOT DISCOVERABLE EVEN IN MANHOOD—THE EDUCATION OF THE YOUTH MAY NOT BE THAT OF HIS GENIUS—AN UNSETTLED IMPULSE, QUERULOUS TILL IT FINDS ITS TRUE OCCUPATION—WITH SOME, CURIOSITY AS INTENSE A FACULTY AS INVENTION—WHAT THE YOUTH FIRST APPLIES TO IS COMMONLY HIS DELIGHT AFTERWARDS—FACTS OF THE DECISIVE CHARACTER OF GENIUS.

We are entering into a fairy land, touching only shadows, and chasing the most changeable lights; many stories we shall hear, and many scenes will open on us; yet though realities are but dimly to be traced in this twilight of imagination and tradition, we think that the first impulses of genius may be often judged by the subsequent actions of

the individual; and whenever we find these in perfect harmony, it will be difficult to convince us that there does not exist a secret connexion between those first impulses and these last actions.

Can we then trace in the faint lines of his youth, an unsteady outline of the man? In the temperament of genius may we not reasonably look for certain indications or predispositions, announcing the permanent character? Is not great sensibility born with its irritable fibres? Will not the deep retired character cling to its musings? And the unalterable being of intrepidity and fortitude, commanding even amidst his sports, lead on his equals? The boyhood of CATO was marked by the sternness of the man, in his speech, his countenance, and his puerile amusements; and the same is remarkable in BACON, DESCARTES, HOBBES, GRAY, and others, who betrayed the same early appearance of their intellectual vigour and precocity of character.

The virtuous and contemplative BOYLE imagined that he had discovered in childhood that disposition of mind which indicated an instinctive in-

genuousness; an incident which he relates, evinced, as he thought, that even then he preferred aggravating his fault, rather than consent to suppress any part of the truth, an effort which had been unnatural to his mind. His fanciful, yet striking illustration may open our inquiry. "This trivial passage," the little story alluded to, "I have mentioned now, not that I think that in itself it deserves a relation, but because as the sun is seen best at his rising and his setting, so men's native dispositions are clearliest perceived whilst they are children and when they are dying. These little sudden actions are the greatest discoverers of men's true humours."

ALFIERI, that historian of the literary mind, was conscious that even in his childhood the peculiarity and the melancholy of his character prevailed: a boyhood passed in domestic solitude, promoted the interior feelings of his impassioned character; and in noticing some incidents of a childish nature, this man of genius observes, "Whoever will reflect on these inept circumstances, and explore into the seeds of the passions

of man, possibly may find these neither so laughable nor so puerile as they may appear." His native genius, or by whatever other term we may describe it, betrayed the wayward predispositions of some of his poetical brothers: "Taciturn and placid for the most part, but at times loquacious and most vivacious, and usually in the most opposite extremes; stubborn and impatient against force, but most open to kindness, more restrained by the dread of reprimand than by any thing else, susceptible of shame to excess, but inflexible if violently opposed." Such is the portrait of a child of seven years old, which induced that great tragic bard to deduce this result from his own self-experience, that "*man* is a continuation of the *child* *."

That the dispositions of genius in early life presage its future character was long the feeling of antiquity. CICERO, in his Dialogue on Old Age,

* See in his Life, chap. IV., entitled *Sviluppo dell' indole indicato da vari fattarelli.* "Development of genius, or natural inclination, indicated by various little matters."

employs a beautiful analogy drawn from nature, marking her secret conformity in all things which have life and come from her hands; and the human mind is one of her plants.—"Youth is the vernal season of life, and the blossoms it then puts forth are indications of those future fruits which are to be gathered in the succeeding periods." One of the masters of the human mind, after much previous observation of those who attended his lectures, would advise one to engage in political studies, exhorted another to compose history, elected these to be poets, and those to be orators; ISOCRATES believed that Nature had some concern in forming a man of genius, and tried to guess at her secret by detecting the first energetic inclination of the mind. Such, too, was the principle which guided the Jesuits, those other great masters in the art of education; who studied the characteristics of their pupils with such singular care as to keep a secret register in their colleges, descriptive of their talents, and the natural turn of their dispositions. In some cases they guessed with remarkable felicity. They described Fontenelle,

adolescens omnibus numeris absolutus et inter discipulos princeps, "a youth accomplished in every respect, and the model for his companions;" but when they described the elder Crebillon, *puer ingeniosus sed insignis nebulo,* "a shrewd boy, but a great rascal," they might not have erred so much as they appear to have done; for an impetuous boyhood showed the decision of a character which afterwards misanthropically settled in imaginary scenes of horror, and inventing characters of unparalleled atrocity.

In the old romance of King Arthur, when a cowherd comes to the king to request he would make his son a knight—"It is a great thing thou askest," said Arthur, who inquired whether this intreaty proceeded from him or his son? The old man's answer is remarkable—"Of my son, not of me; for I have thirteen sons, and all these will fall to that labour I put them; but this child will not labour for me, for any thing that I and my wife will do; but always he will be shooting and casting darts, and glad for to see battles, and to behold knights, and always day and night he de-

sireth of me to be made a knight." The king commanded the cowherd to fetch all his sons; they were all shapen much like the poor man; but Tor was not like none of them in shape and in countenance, for he was much more than any of them. And so Arthur knighted him." This simple tale is the history of genius—the cowherd's twelve sons were like himself, but the unhappy genius in the family, who perplexed and plagued the cowherd and his wife and his twelve brothers, was the youth averse to the common labour, and dreaming on chivalry amidst a herd of cows.

A man of genius is thus dropt among the people, and has first to encounter the difficulties of ordinary men deprived of that feeble ductility which adapts itself to the common destination. Parents are too often the victims of the decided propensity of a son to a Virgil or an Euclid; and the first step into life of a man of genius is disobedience and grief. LILLY, our famous astrologer, has described the frequent situation of such a youth, like the cowherd's son who would

be a knight. LILLY proposed to his father that he should try his fortune in the metropolis, where he expected that his learning and his talents would prove serviceable to him; the father, quite incapable of discovering the latent genius of his son in his studious dispositions, very willingly consented to get rid of him, for, as LILLY proceeds, "I could not work, drive the plough, or endure any country labour; my father oft would say I was *good for nothing*,"—words which the fathers of so many men of genius have repeated.

In reading the memoirs of a man of genius we often reprobate the domestic persecutions of those who opposed his inclinations. No poet but is moved with indignation at the recollection of the tutor at the Port Royal thrice burning the romance which RACINE at length got by heart; no geometrician but bitterly inveighs against the father of PASCAL for not suffering him to study Euclid, which he at length understood without studying. The father of PETRARCH burnt the poetical library of his son amidst the shrieks, the groans, and the tears of the youth. Yet this neither con-

verted Petrarch into a sober lawyer, nor deprived him of the Roman laurel. The uncle of ALFIERI for more than twenty years suppressed the poetical character of this noble bard; he was a poet without knowing to write a verse, and Nature, like a hard creditor, exacted with redoubled interest, all the genius which the uncle had so long kept from her. Such are the men whose inherent impulse no human opposition, and even no adverse education, can deter from being great men.

Let us, however, be just to the parents of a man of genius; they have another association of ideas concerning him than we; we see a great man, they a disobedient child; we track him through his glory, they are wearied by the sullen resistance of his character. The career of genius is rarely that of fortune or happiness; and the father, who may himself be not insensible to glory, dreads lest his son be found among that obscure multitude, that populace of mean artists, self-deluded yet self-dissatisfied, who must expire at the barriers of mediocrity.

If the youth of genius is struggling with a con-

cealed impulse, he will often be thrown into a train of secret instruction which no master can impart. Hippocrates profoundly observed, that "our *natures* have not been taught us by any master." That faculty which the youth of genius in after-life shall display may exist long ere it is perceived; and it will only make its own what is homogeneous with itself: we may often observe how the mind of this youth stubbornly rejects whatever is contrary to its habits, and alien to its affections. Of a solitary character, for solitariness is the wild nurse of his contemplations, he is fancifully described by one of the race—and here fancies are facts.

> "He is retired as noon-tide dew,
> Or fountain in a noon-day grove."

The romantic SIDNEY exclaimed, "Eagles fly alone, and they are but sheep which always herd together."

As yet this being, in the first rudiments of his sensations, is touched by rapid emotions, and disturbed by a vague restlessness; for him the images

of nature are yet dim, and he feels before he thinks; for imagination precedes reflection. One truly inspired unfolds the secret story—

" Endow'd with all that Nature can bestow,
The child of fancy oft in silence bends
O'er the mixt treasures of his pregnant breast
With conscious pride. From thence he oft resolves
To frame he knows not what excelling things;
And win he knows not what sublime reward
Of praise and wonder!"—

But the solitude of the youth of genius has a local influence; it is full of his own creations of his unmarked passions and his uncertain thoughts, —and such have often given a name to their favourite haunts, suggested by the bent of their mind; as PETRARCH called his retreat *Linternum*, after that of his hero Scipio; and a young poet, from some favourite description in Cowley, called a spot he loved to muse in, " Cowley's Walk."

A temperament of this kind has been often mistaken for melancholy. " When the intermission of my studies allowed me leisure for recreation," says BOYLE, of his early life, " I would very often

steal away from all company, and spend four or five hours alone in the fields, and think at random; making my delighted imagination the busy scene where some romance or other was daily acted." This circumstance alarmed his friends, who concluded that he was overcome with a growing melancholy. ALFIERI found himself in this precise situation and experienced these undefinable emotions, when in his first travels at Marseilles, his lonely spirit only haunted the theatre and the seashore; the tragic drama was then casting its influences over his unconscious genius. Almost every evening, after bathing in the sea, it delighted him to retreat to a little recess where the land jutted out; there would he sit, leaning his back against a high rock, which he tells us, "concealed from my sight every part of the land behind me, while before and around me I beheld nothing but the sea and the heavens; the sun, sinking into the waves, was lighting up and embellishing these two immensities; there would I pass a delicious hour of fantastic ruminations, and there I should have composed many a poem, had I then known

to write either in verse or prose in any language whatever." An incident of this nature is revealed to us by the other noble and mighty spirit of our times, who could most truly exhibit the history of the youth of genius, and he has painted forth the enthusiasm of the boy TASSO.

" ———— From my very birth
My soul was drunk with love, which did pervade
And mingle with whate'er I saw on earth;
Of objects all inanimate I made
Idols, and out of wild and lonely flowers
And rocks whereby they grew, a paradise,
Where I did lay me down within the shade
Of waving trees, and dream'd uncounted hours,
Though I was chid for wandering."

The youth of genius will be apt to retire from the active sports of his mates. BEATTIE paints himself in his own Minstrel,

Concourse, and noise, and toil he ever fled,
Nor cared to mingle in the clamorous fray
Of squabbling imps; but to the forest sped.

BOSSUET would not join his young companions, and flew to his solitary task, while the classical

boys avenged themselves by a schoolboy's villanous pun; applying to *Bossuet* Virgil's *bos suetus aratro*, the ox daily toiling in the plough.

The learned HUET has given an amusing detail of the inventive persecutions of his schoolmates, to divert him from his obstinate love of study. "At length, in order to indulge my own taste, I would rise with the sun, while they were buried in sleep, and hide myself in the woods, that I might read and study in quiet;" but they beat the bushes, and started in his burrow the future man of erudition. Sir WILLIAM JONES was rarely a partaker in the active sports of Harrow; it was said of GRAY that he was never a boy; the unhappy CHATTERTON and BURNS were remarkably serious in youth; as were HOBBES and BACON. MILTON has preserved for us, in solemn numbers, his school-life—

> "When I was yet a child, no childish play
> To me was pleasing; all my mind was set
> Serious to learn and know, and thence to do
> What might be public good: myself I thought
> Born to that end, born to promote all truth,
> All righteous things."

It is remarkable that this love of repose and musing is retained throughout life. A man of fine genius is rarely enamoured of common amusements or of robust exercises; and he is usually unadroit where dexterity of hand or eye, or trivial elegancies, are required. This characteristic of genius was discovered by HORACE in that Ode which schoolboys often versify. BEATTIE has expressly told us of his Minstrel,

> "The exploit of strength, dexterity, or speed
> To him nor vanity nor joy could bring."

ALFIERI said he could never be taught by a French dancing-master, whose art made him at once shudder and laugh. HORACE, by his own confession, was a very awkward rider, and the poet could not always secure a seat on his mule; METASTASIO humorously complains of his gun; the poetical sportsman could only frighten the hares and partridges; the truth was, as an elder poet sings,

> "Instead of hounds that make the wooded hills
> Talk in a hundred voices to the rills,

I like the pleasing cadence of a line
Struck by the concert of the sacred Nine"

And we discover the true "humour" of the indolent contemplative race in their great representatives VIRGIL and HORACE. When they accompanied Mecænas into the country, while the minister amused himself at tennis, the two bards reposed on a vernal bank amidst the freshness of the shade. The younger Pliny, who was so perfect a literary character, was charmed by the Roman mode of hunting, or rather fowling by nets, which admitted him to sit a whole day with his tablets and stylus, that, says he, "should I return with empty nets, my tablets may at least be full." THOMSON was the hero of his own Castle of Indolence; and the elegant WALLER infuses the true feeling:

"Oh, how I long my careless limbs to lay
Under the plantane shade, and all the day
Invoke the Muses and improve my vein."

The youth of genius, whom BEATTIE has drawn after himself, and I after observation, a poet of

great genius, as I understand, has declared to be "too effeminate and timid, and too much troubled with delicate nerves. The *greatest poets* of all countries," he continues, "have been men eminently endowed with *bodily powers*, and rejoiced and excelled in all *manly exercises*." May not our critic of northern habits have often mistaken the art of the great poets in *describing* such "manly exercises or bodily powers," for the proof of their "rejoicing and excelling in them?" Poets and artists, from their habits, are not usually muscular and robust. The continuity of intellectual pursuits, with the enfeebling nature of sedentary habits, and often of constitutional delicacy, rarely combine with corporeal skill and activity. The inconveniences attached to the inferior sedentary occupations are participated in by men of genius; the analogy is obvious, and their fate is common. Literary men may be included in Ramazzini's Treatise on the Diseases of Artisans. ROUSSEAU has described the labours of the closet as enervating men, and weakening the constitution,

while study wears the whole machinery of man, exhausts the spirits, destroys his strength, and renders him pusillanimous*. But there is a higher principle which guides us to declare that men of genius should not *excel* in "all manly exercises." SENECA, whose habits were completely literary, admonishes the man of letters that "Whatever amusement he chooses, he should not slowly return from those of the body to the mind, while he should be exercising the latter night and day." Seneca was aware that "to rejoice and excel in all manly exercises," would in some cases intrude into the habits of a literary man, and sometimes be even ridiculous. MORTIMER, once a celebrated artist, was tempted by his athletic frame to indulge in frequent violent exercises; and it is not without reason suspected, that habits so unfavourable to thought and study precluded that promising genius from attaining to the maturity of his talents, however he might have succeeded in invigorating his physical powers.

* In the preface to the "Narcisse."

But so true is it that this love of solitude is an early passion, that two men of genius of very opposite characters, the one a French wit and the other a French philosopher, have acknowledged that they had felt its influence, and they even imagined that they had discovered its cause. The Abbé de ST. PIERRE, in his political annals, tells us, "I remember to have heard old SEGRAIS remark, that most young people of both sexes had at one time in their lives, generally about seventeen or eighteen years of age, an inclination to retire from the world. He maintained this to be a species of melancholy, and humorously called it the small-pox of the mind, because scarce one in a thousand escaped the attack. I myself have had this distemper, but am not much marked with it."

If the youth of genius is apt to retire from the ordinary sports of his mates, he will often substitute others, the reflections of those favourite studies which are haunting his young imagination, as men in their dreams repeat the conceptions which have habitually interested them; the amusements of such an idler have often been analogous

to his later pursuits. ARIOSTO, while yet a schoolboy, seems to have been very susceptible of poetry, for he composed a sort of tragedy from the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, to have it represented by his brothers and sisters, and at this time also delighted himself in translating the old French and Spanish romances. Sir WILLIAM JONES at Harrow divided the fields according to a map of Greece, and to each schoolfellow portioned out a dominion; and when wanting a copy of the Tempest to act from, he supplied it from his memory: we must confess that the boy JONES was reflecting in his amusements the cast of mind he displayed in his after-life, and that felicity of memory and taste so prevalent in his literary character. FLORIAN'S earliest years were passed in shooting birds all day, and reading every evening an old translation of the Iliad: whenever he got a bird remarkable for its size or its plumage, he personified it by one of the names of his heroes, and raising a funeral pyre, consumed the body: collecting the ashes in an urn, he presented them to his grandfather, with a narrative of his Patroclus or Sarpedon.

[illegible] the author of Numa
[illegible] William
[illegible] Queen Elizabeth
[illegible] The
[illegible] majesty
[illegible] He was two
[illegible] happy reign."
[illegible] this mixture
[illegible] political courtier-
[illegible] his father's habits,
[illegible] Bacon's man-
[illegible] contemporary
[illegible] this great phi-
[illegible] lie on packs of
[illegible] for his father, who
[illegible] the market-place
[illegible] private opinions, which
[illegible] appeared in his writings.
[illegible] of talent when a youth
[illegible] equals; at that moment of
[illegible] the one side and no artifice

on the other, all emotion and no reflection, the boy who has obtained a predominance has acquired this merely by native powers. The boyhood of NELSON was characterised by events congenial to those of his after-days; and his father understood his character when he declared that "in whatever station he might be placed, he would climb, if possible, to the top of the tree." Some puerile anecdotes which FRANKLIN remembered of himself, in association with his after-life, betray the invention, and the firm intrepidity of his character, and even perhaps the carelessness of the means to obtain his purpose. In boyhood he felt a desire for adventure; but as his father would not consent to a sea-life, he made the river near him represent the ocean; he lived on the water, and was the daring Columbus of a schoolboy's boat. A part where he and his mates stood to angle, in time became a quagmire: in the course of one day the infant projector thought of a wharf for them to stand on, and raised it with a heap of stones deposited there for the building of a house. With that sort of practical wisdom, or Ulyssean cunning, which

marked his mature character, FRANKLIN raised his wharf at the expense of another's house; his contrivances to aid his puny labourers, with his resolution not to quit the great work till it was effected, seem to strike out to us the decision and invention of his future character. But such qualities as would attract the companions of a schoolboy, may not be those which are essential to fine genius. The captain or leader of his schoolmates has a claim on our attention; but it is the sequestered boy who may chance to be the artist or the literary character. Some facts which have been recorded of men of genius at this period are remarkable. We are told by Miss Seward, that JOHNSON, when a boy at the free-school, appeared "a huge overgrown mishapen stripling;" but was considered as a stupendous stripling, "for even at that early period of life Johnson maintained his opinions with the same sturdy dogmatical and arrogant fierceness." The puerile characters of Lord BOLINGBROKE and Sir ROBERT WALPOLE, schoolfellows and rivals, were observed to prevail through their after-life; the liveliness and brilliancy of Boling-

broke appeared in his attacks on Walpole, whose solid and industrious qualities triumphed by resistance. A parallel circumstance might be pointed out in two great statesmen of our own days; in the wisdom of the one and the wit of the other, whom nature made rivals, and time made friends or enemies, as it happened. A curious observer, in looking over a collection of the Cambridge poems which were formerly composed by its students, has remarked, that "Cowley from the first was quaint, Milton sublime, and Barrow copious." Should this opinion be found exact, it affords a principle which ought not to be neglected at this obscure period of the youth of genius.

Is there then a period in youth which yields decisive marks of the character of genius? The natures of men are as various as their fortunes. Some, like diamonds, must wait to receive their splendor from the slow touches of the polisher, while others, resembling pearls, appear at once born with their beauteous lustre.

Among the inauspicious circumstances is the feebleness of the first attempts; and we must not

decide on the talents of a young man by his first works. DRYDEN and SWIFT might have been deterred from authorship, had their earliest pieces decided their fate. SMOLLET, before he knew which way his genius would conduct him, had early conceived a high notion of his talents for dramatic poetry: his tragedy of "The Regicide" was refused by Garrick, whom he never afterwards forgave, and continued to abuse our Roscius through his works of genius, for having discountenanced his first work, which had none. RACINE's earliest composition, by some fragments his son has preserved, remarkably contrast with his writings, for these abound with those points and conceits which he afterwards abhorred; the tender author of Andromache could not have been discovered while exhausting himself in running after *concetti* as surprising as the worst parts of Cowley; in whose spirit alone he could have hit on this perplexing *concetto* descriptive of Aurora; "Fille de Jour, qui nais devant ton pere!"— "Daughter of Day, but born before thy father!" GIBBON betrayed none of the force and magnitude

of his powers in his "Essay on Literature," or his attempted "History of Switzerland." JOHNSON's cadenced prose is not recognizable in the humbler simplicity of his earliest years. Many authors have begun unsuccessfully the walk they afterwards excelled in. RAPHAEL, when he first drew his meagre forms under Perugino, had not yet conceived one line of that ideal beauty, which one day he of all men could alone execute. Who could have imagined, in examining the *Dream* of Raphael, that the same pencil could hereafter have poured out the miraculous *Transfiguration?* Or that in the imitative pupil of Hudson, our country was at length to pride herself in another Raphael?

Even the manhood of genius may pass unobserved by his companions, and, like Æneas, he may be hidden in a cloud amidst his associates. The celebrated FABIUS MAXIMUS in his boyhood was called in derision "the little sheep," from the meekness and gravity of his disposition. His sedateness and taciturnity, his indifference to juvenile amusements, his slowness and difficulty in learning, and his ready submission to his equals,

induced them to consider him as one irrecoverably stupid. That greatness of mind, unalterable courage, and invincible character FABIUS afterwards displayed, they then imagined had lain concealed in the apparent contrary qualities. The boy of genius may indeed seem slow and dull even to the phlegmatic; for thoughtful and observing dispositions conceal themselves in timorous silent characters, who have not yet experienced their strength; and that assiduous love, which cannot tear itself away from the secret instruction it is perpetually imbibing, cannot be easily distinguished from that pertinacity which goes on with the mere plodder. We often hear from the early companions of a man of genius, that at school he had appeared heavy and unpromising. Rousseau imagined that the childhood of some men is accompanied by that seeming and deceitful dulness, which is the sign of a profound genius; and Roger Ascham has placed among "the best natures for learning, the sad-natured and hard-witted child;" that is, the thoughtful, or the melancholic, and the slow. The young painters, to ridicule the per-

severing labours of DOMENICHINO, which were at first so heavy and unpromising, called him "the great ox;" and Passeri, while he has happily expressed the still labours of his concealed genius, *sua taciturna lentezza*, his silent slowness, expresses his surprise at the accounts he received of the early life of this great artist. "It is difficult to believe, what many assert, that from the beginning this great painter had a ruggedness about him, which entirely incapacitated him from learning his profession, and they have heard from himself that he quite despaired of success. Yet I cannot comprehend how such vivacious talents, with a mind so finely organised, and accompanied with such favourable dispositions for the art, would show such signs of utter incapacity; I rather think that it is a mistake in the proper knowledge of genius, which some imagine indicates itself most decisively by its sudden vehemence, showing itself like lightning, and like lightning passing away." A parallel case we find in GOLDSMITH, who passed through an unpromising youth; he declared that he was never attached to literature till he was

thirty; that poetry had no peculiar charms for him till that age*; and, indeed, to his latest hour he was surprising his friends by productions which they had imagined he was incapable of composing. HUME was considered, for his sobriety and assiduity, as competent to become a steady merchant, as it was said of BOILEAU that he had no great understanding, but would speak ill of no one; and this circumstance of the character in youth being entirely mistaken, or entirely opposite to the subsequent one of mature life, has been noticed of many. Even a discerning parent or master has entirely failed to develop the genius of the youth, who has afterwards ranked among eminent men; and we ought as little to infer from early unfavourable appearances as from inequality of talent. The great ISAAC BARROW's father used to say, that if it pleased God to take from him any of his children, he hoped it might be Isaac, as the

* This is a remarkable expression from Goldsmith; but it is much more so, when we hear it from Lord Byron. See a note in the following chapter, on "The first Studies."

least promising; and during the three years Barrow passed at the Charter-house, he was remarkable only for the utter negligence of his studies and of his person. The mother of SHERIDAN, herself a literary female, pronounced early, that he was the dullest and most hopeless of her sons. BODMER, at the head of the literary class in Switzerland, who had so frequently discovered and animated the literary youths of his country, could never detect the latent genius of GESNER: after a repeated examination of the young man, he put his parents in despair with the hopeless award that a mind of so ordinary a cast must confine itself to mere writing and accompts. One fact, however, Bodmer had overlooked when he pronounced the fate of our poet and artist—the dull youth, who could not retain barren words, discovered an active fancy in the images of things; while at his grammar lessons, as it happened to Lucian, he was employing those tedious hours in modelling in wax groups of men, animals, and other figures: the rod of the pedagogue often interrupted the fingers of our infant moulder, who never ceased working

to amuse his little sisters with his waxen creatures, which constituted all his happiness. Those arts of imitation were already possessing the soul of the boy GESNER, to which afterwards it became so entirely devoted.

Thus it happens that in the first years of life the education of the youth may not be the education of his genius; he lives unknown to himself and to others. In all these cases nature had dropt the seeds in the soil: but even a happy disposition must be concealed amidst adverse circumstances: I repeat that genius cannot make its own, but that which is homogeneous with its nature. It has happened to some men of genius during a long period of their lives, that an unsettled impulse, without having discovered the object of its aptitude, a thirst and fever in the temperament of too sentient a being, which cannot find the occupation to which only it can attach itself, has sunk into a melancholy and querulous spirit, weary with the burthen of existence; but the instant the latent talent had declared itself, his first work, the eager offspring of desire and love, has astonished the

world at once with the birth and the maturity of genius.

We are told that PELLEGRINO TIBALDI, who afterwards obtained the glorious title of "the reformed Michael Angelo," long felt the strongest internal dissatisfaction at his own proficiency; and that one day, in melancholy and despair, he had retired from the city, resolved to starve himself to death: his friend discovered him, and having persuaded him to change his pursuits from painting to architecture, he soon rose to eminence. This story D'Argenville throws some doubt over; but as Tibaldi during twenty years abstained from his pencil, this singular circumstance seems explained by the extraordinary occurrence which others have repeated. TASSO with feverish anxiety pondered on five different subjects before he could decide in the choice of his epic; the same embarrassment was long the fate of GIBBON on the subject of his History. Some have sunk into a deplorable state of utter languishment, from the circumstance of being deprived of the means for pursuing their beloved study, as in the case of the chemist BERG-

MAN. His friends, to gain him over to the more lucrative professions, deprived him of his books of natural history; a plan which had nearly proved fatal to the youth, who with declining health quitted the university: when no longer struggling with that conflicting desire within him, his renewed enthusiasm for his favourite science restored the health he had lost in abandoning it. It was the view of the tomb of Virgil which so powerfully influenced the innate genius of BOCCACCIO, and fixed his instant decision. As yet young, and in the neighbourhood of Naples, wandering for recreation, he reached the tomb of the Mantuan; pausing before it, his youthful mind began to meditate; struck by the universal glory of that great name, he lamented his own fortune to be occupied by the obscure details of merchandize; already he sighed to emulate the fame of the Roman, and as Villani tells us, from that day he abandoned for ever the occupations of commerce, dedicating himself to literature. PROCTOR, the lost Phidias of our country, often told that he should never have quitted his mercantile situation,

but for the accidental sight of Barry's picture of Venus rising from the sea; a picture which produced so immediate an effect on his mind, that it determined him to quit a lucrative occupation. Surely we cannot account for such sudden effusions of the mind, and instant decisions, but by the principle of that predisposition which only waits for an occasion to declare itself.

Abundant facts exhibit genius unequivocally discovering itself in the juvenile age, connecting these facts with the subsequent life—and in general, perhaps, a master-mind exhibits precocity. "Whatever a young man at first applies himself to, is commonly his delight afterwards." This remark was made by HARTLEY, who has related an anecdote of the infancy of his genius, which indicated the manhood. He declared to his daughter that the intention of writing a book upon the nature of man, was conceived in his mind when he was a very little boy—when swinging backwards and forwards upon a gate, not more than nine or ten years old; he was then meditating upon the nature of his own mind, how man was made, and

for what future end: such was the true origin, in a boy of ten years old, of his celebrated book on "The Frame, the Duty, and the Expectation of Man." JOHN HUNTER conceived his notion of the principle of life, which to his last day formed the subject of his inquiries and experiments when he was very young; for at that period of life, Mr. Abernethy tells us, he began his observations on the incubated egg, which suggested or corroborated his opinions. A learned friend, and an observer of men of science, has supplied me with a remark highly deserving notice; it is an observation that will generally hold good, that the most important systems of theory, however late they may be published, have been formed at a very early period of life. This important observation may be verified by some striking facts. A most curious one will be found in Lord BACON's letter to Father Fulgentio, where he gives an account of his projecting his philosophy thirty years before, during his youth. MILTON from early youth mused on the composition of an Epic; DE THOU has himself told us, that from his

tender youth his mind was full of the idea of composing a history of his own times; and his whole life was passed in preparation, and in a continued accession of materials for a future period. From the age of twenty, MONTESQUIEU was preparing the materials of *L'Esprit des Loix*, by extracts from the immense volumes of civil law. TILLEMONT's vast labours were traced out in his mind at the early age of nineteen, on reading Baronius; and some of the finest passages in RACINE's tragedies were composed while a pupil, wandering in the woods of the Port-Royal. So true is it that the seeds of many of our great literary and scientific works were lying, for many years antecedent to their being given to the world, in a latent state of germination*.

* I need not to be reminded, that I am not worth mentioning among the illustrious men who have long formed the familiar subjects of my delightful researches. But with the middling as well as with the great, the same habits must operate. Early in life, I was struck by the inductive philosophy of Bacon, and sought after a Moral Experimental Philosophy; and I had then in my mind an observation of Lord Bolingbroke's, for I see I quoted it thirty years ago, that "Abstract, or general

The predisposition of genius has declared itself in painters and poets, who were such before they understood the nature of colours and the arts of verse; and this vehement propensity, so mysteriously constitutional, may be traced in other intellectual characters as well as those which belong to the class of imagination. It was said that PITT was *born* a minister; the late Dr. SHAW I always considered as one *born* a naturalist, and I know a great literary antiquary who seems to me to have been *born* such; for the passion of *curiosity* is as intense a faculty, or instinct, with some casts of mind, as is that of *invention* with poets and painters: I confess that to me it is *genius* in a form in which genius has not yet been

propositions, though never so true, appear obscure or doubtful to us very often till they are explained by examples." So far back as in 1793, I published "a Dissertation on Anecdotes," with the simplicity of a young votary; there I deduced results, and threw out a magnificent project not very practicable. From that time to the hour I am now writing, my metal has been running in this mould, and I still keep casting philosophy into anecdotes, and anecdotes into philosophy. As I began, I fear I shall end.

suspected to appear. One of the biographers of Sir HANS SLOANE expresses himself in this manner: "Our author's *thirst* for knowledge seems to have been *born* with him; so that his *Cabinet of Rarities* may be said to have commenced with *his being*." This strange metaphorical style has only confused an obscure truth. SLOANE early in life felt an irresistible impulse which inspired him with the most enlarged views of the productions of nature, and he exulted in their accomplishment; for in his will he has solemnly recorded, that his collections were the fruits of his early devotion; *having had from my youth a strong inclination to the study of plants, and all other productions of nature.* The vehement passion of PEIRESC for knowledge, according to accounts Gassendi had received from old men who had known him as a child, broke out as soon as he had been taught his alphabet; for then his delight was to be handling books and papers, and his perpetual inquiries after their contents obliged them to invent something to quiet the child's insatiable curiosity, who was hurt when told, that he had not the

capacity to understand them. He did not study as an ordinary scholar, for he never read but with perpetual researches. At ten years of age, his passion for the studies of antiquity was kindled at the sight of some ancient coins dug up in his neighbourhood; then, that vehement passion for knowledge "began to burn like fire in a forest," as Gassendi happily describes the fervour and amplitude of the mind of this man of vast learning. Bayle, who was an experienced judge in the history of genius, observes on two friars, one of whom was haunted by a strong disposition to *genealogical*, and the other to *geographical* pursuits, that, "let a man do what he will, if nature inclines us to certain things, there is no preventing the gratification of our desire though it lies hid under a monk's frock." It is not, therefore, as the world is apt to imagine, only poets and painters for whom is reserved this restless and impetuous propensity for their particular pursuits; I claim it for the man of science as well as for the man of imagination.—And I confess, that I consider this strong bent of the mind in men eminent in pursuits in

which imagination is little concerned and whom men of genius have chosen to remove so far from their class as another gifted aptitude. They, too, share in the glorious fever of genius, and we feel how just was the expression formerly used, of "their *thirst* for knowledge."

But to return to the men of genius who answer more strictly to the popular notion of inventors. We have BOCCACCIO's own words for a proof of his early natural tendency to tale-writing, in a passage of his Genealogy of the Gods: "Before seven years of age, when as yet I had met with no stories, was without a master, and hardly knew my letters, I had a natural talent for fiction, and produced some little tales." Thus the *Decamerone* was appearing much earlier than we suppose. DESCARTES, while yet a boy, indulged such habits of deep meditation, that he was nicknamed by his companions "The Philosopher," always questioning, and still settling the cause and the effect. He was twenty-five years of age before he left the army, but the propensity for meditation had been early formed; and he has himself given an ac-

count of the pursuits which occupied his youth, and of the progress of his genius; of that secret struggle he so long held with himself, wandering in concealment over the world for more than twenty years, as he says of himself, like the statuary labouring to draw out a Minerva from the marble block. MICHAEL ANGELO, as yet a child, wherever he went, busied himself in drawing; and when his noble parents, hurt that a man of genius was disturbing the line of their ancestry, forced him to relinquish the pencil, the infant artist flew to the chisel: the art which was in his soul would not allow of idle hands. LOPE DE VEGA, VELASQUEZ, ARIOSTO, and TASSO, are all said to have betrayed at their school-tasks the most marked indications of their subsequent characteristics.

This decision of the impulse of genius is apparent in MURILLO. This young artist, unknown at the place of his birth, witnessed the arrival of a brother-artist from London, where he had studied under Vandyke; and he surprised MURILLO by that chaste, and to him hitherto unknown manner.

Instantly he conceived the project of quitting his native Seville and flying to Italy—the fever of genius broke forth with all its restlessness. But he was destitute of the most ordinary means to pursue a journey, and forced on an expedient he purchased a piece of canvass, which, dividing into parts, he painted on each, figures of saints, of landscapes and of flowers; a humble merchandize of art adapted to the taste and devout feelings of the times, and which were readily sold to the adventurers to the Indies. With these small means he departed, having communicated his project to no one except to a beloved sister, whose tears could not prevail to keep the lad at home; the impetuous impulse had blinded him to the perils, and the impracticability of his wild project. He got to Madrid, where the great Velasquez, his countryman, was struck by the ingenuous simplicity of the youth urgently requesting letters for Rome; and when he inquired into the reason, and understood the purport of this romantic journey, Velasquez assured him that he need not proceed to Italy to learn its art;

for he opened the royal galleries to the youth, and cherished his studies. MURILLO returned to his native city, where from his obscurity he had never been missed, having ever lived a retired life of silent labour; but this painter of nature returned to make the city which had not noticed his absence, the theatre of his glory. The same imperious impulse drove CALLOT, at the age of twelve years, from his paternal roof: his parents, from prejudices of birth, had conceived that the art of engraving was one beneath the studies of their son; but the boy had listened to stories of the miracles of Italian art, and with a curiosity far greater than any self-consideration, he flew away one morning; and many days had not elapsed when finding himself in the utmost distress, with a gang of gipsies he arrived at Florence. A merchant of Nancy discovered him, and returned the reluctant boy of genius to his home; again he flies to Italy, and again his brother discovers him, and reconducts him to his parents: the father, whose patience and forgiveness were now exhausted, permitted his son to become the most

original genius of French art; who, in his vivacious groups, the touch of his graver, and the natural expression of his figures, anticipated the genius of Hogarth.

Facts of this decisive character are abundant: see the boy NANTEUIL hiding himself in a tree to pursue the delightful exercise of his pencil, while his parents were averse to their son practising drawing; see HANDEL, intended for a doctor of the civil laws, and whom no parental discouragement could deprive of his enthusiasm for the musical science, for ever touching harpsichords, and having secretly conveyed a musical instrument to a retired apartment, sitting through the night awakening his harmonious spirit; observe FERGUSON, the child of a peasant, acquiring the art of reading without any one suspecting it by listening to his father teaching his brother; making a wooden watch without the slightest knowledge of mechanism, and while a shepherd, like an ancient Chaldean, studying the phenomena of the heavens, on a celestial globe formed by his own hand. That great mechanic SMEATON, when a child,

disdained the ordinary playthings of his age; he collected the tools of workmen, observed them at their work, and asked questions, till he could work himself. One day, having watched some millwrights, the child was shortly after, to the distress of the family, discovered in a very dangerous situation, being seen at the top of the barn, fixing up something like a windmill. Many circumstances of this nature occurred before his sixth year. His father, an attorney, sent him up to London to be brought up to the same profession; but he declared that "the study of the law did not suit the *bent of his genius*;" a term he frequently used. He addressed a strong memorial to his father, to show his utter incompetency to study law; and the good sense of the father abandoned Smeaton "to the bent of his genius in his own way." Such is the history of the man who raised the Edystone lighthouse, in the midst of the waves, like the rock on which it stands.

Can we hesitate to believe, that in such minds there was a resistless and mysterious propensity, "growing with the growth" of these youths, who

seem to have been placed out of the influence of that casual excitement, or any other of those sources of genius, so frequently assigned for its production?

Yet these cases are not more striking than one related of the Abbé La Caille, who ranked among the first astronomers of the age. La Caille was the son of the parish clerk of a village; at the age of ten years his father sent him every evening to ring the church bell, but the boy always returned home late: his father was angry, and beat him, and still the boy returned an hour after he had rung the bell. The father, suspecting something mysterious in his conduct, one evening watched him. He saw his son ascend the steeple, ring the bell as usual, and remain there during an hour. When the unlucky boy descended, he trembled like one caught in the fact, and on his knees confessed that the pleasure he took in watching the stars from the steeple was the real cause of detaining him from home. As the father was not born to be an astronomer, he flogged the boy severely. The youth was found weeping in

the streets by a man of science, who, when he discovered in a boy of ten years of age a passion for contemplating the stars at night, and who had discovered an observatory in a steeple, he decided that the seal of nature had impressed itself on the genius of that boy. Relieving the parent from the son, and the son from the parent, he assisted the young LA CAILLE in his passionate pursuit, and the event completely justified the prediction. How children feel a predisposition for the studies of astronomy, or mechanics, or architecture, or natural history, is that secret in nature we have not guessed: there may be a virgin thought as well as a habit—nature before education—which first opens the mind, and ever afterwards is shaping its tender folds; accidents may occur to call it forth, but thousands of youths have found themselves in parallel situations with SMEATON, FERGUSON, and LA CAILLE, without experiencing their energies.

The case of CLAIRON, the great French tragic actress, who seems to have been an actress before she saw a theatre, deserves attention. This

female, destined to be a sublime tragedian, was of the lowest extraction; the daughter of a violent and illiterate woman, who with blows and menaces was driving about the child all day to manual labour. "I know not," says Clairon, "whence I derived my disgust, but I could not bear the idea to be a mere workwoman, or to remain inactive in a corner." In her eleventh year being locked up in a room as a punishment, with the windows fastened, she climbed upon a chair to look about her. A new object instantly absorbed her attention; in the house opposite she observed a celebrated actress amidst her family; her daughter was performing her dancing lesson: the girl Clairon, the future Melpomene, was struck by the influence of this graceful and affectionate scene. "All my little being collected itself into my eyes; I lost not a single motion; as soon as the lesson ended, all the family applauded, and the mother embraced the daughter. The difference of her fate and mine filled me with profound grief; my tears hindered me from seeing any longer, and when the palpitations of my heart allowed me to reascend the

chair, all had disappeared." This scene was a discovery; from that moment she knew no rest, and rejoiced when she could get her mother to confine her in that room. The happy girl was a divinity to the unhappy one, whose susceptible genius imitated her in every gesture and motion; and Clairon soon showed the effect of her ardent studies, for she betrayed all the graces she had taught herself, in the common intercourse of life; she charmed her friends and even softened her barbarous mother; in a word, she was an actress without knowing what an actress was.

In this case of the youth of genius, are we to conclude that the accidental view of a young actress practising her studies, imparted the character of Clairon? Could a mere chance occurrence have given birth to those faculties which produced a sublime tragedian? In all arts there are talents which may be acquired by imitation and reflection,—and thus far may genius be educated; but there are others which are entirely the result of native sensibility, which often secretly torment the possessor, and which may

even be lost from the want of development; a state of languor from which many have not recovered. Clairon, before she saw the young actress, and having yet no conception of a theatre, never having entered one, had in her soul that latent faculty which creates a genius of her cast. "Had I not felt like Dido," she once exclaimed, "I could not have thus personified her!"

The force of impressions received in the warm susceptibility of the childhood of genius is probably little known to us; but we may perceive them also working in the *moral character*, which frequently discovers itself in childhood, and which manhood cannot always conceal, however it may alter. The intellectual and the moral character are unquestionably closely allied. Erasmus acquaints us, that Sir Thomas More had something ludicrous in his aspect, tending to a smile,—a feature which his portraits preserve; and that he was more inclined to pleasantry and jesting, than to the gravity of the chancellor: this circumstance he imputes to Sir Thomas More "being from a

child so delighted with humour, that he seemed to be even born for it." And we know that he died as he had lived, with a jest on his lips. The hero, who came at length to regret that he had but one world to conquer, betrayed the majesty of his restless genius when but a youth: solicited to join in the course, the princely boy replied, that "He would run in no career where kings were not the competitors." A narrative of the earliest years of Prince Henry, by one of his attendants, forms an authentic collection of juvenile anecdotes, which forcibly struck me that some children deserve to have a biographer at their side; but anecdotes of children are the rarest of biographies, and I deemed it a singular piece of good fortune to have recovered such a remarkable evidence of the precocity of character*. Professor Dugald Stewart has noticed a fact in ARNAULD's infancy, which, considered in connexion with his subsequent life, affords a good illustration

* I have preserved this manuscript narrative in "Curiosities of Literature."

of the force of impressions received in the first dawn of reason. ARNAULD, who to his eightieth year, passed through a life of theological controversy, when a child, amusing himself in the library of the Cardinal Du Perron, requested to have a pen given to him: "For what purpose?" inquired the cardinal. "To write books, like you, against the Huguenots." The cardinal, then aged and infirm, could not conceal his joy at the prospect of so hopeful a successor; and placing the pen in his hand, said, "I give it you as the dying shepherd, Damætas, bequeathed his pipe to the little Corydon." Other children might have asked for a pen—but to write against the Huguenots evinced a deeper feeling and a wider association of ideas, indicating the future polemic.

Some of these facts, we conceive, afford decisive evidence of that instinct in genius, that primary quality of mind, sometimes called organisation, which has inflamed a war of words by an equivocal term. We repeat, that this faculty of genius can exist independent of education, and where

it is wanting, education can never confer it: it is an impulse, an instinct always working in the character of "the chosen mind;"

> "One with our feelings and our powers,
> And rather part of us, than ours."

In the history of genius, there are unquestionably many secondary causes of considerable influence in developing, or even crushing the germ—these have been of late often detected, and sometimes carried to a ridiculous extreme; but among them none seem more remarkable than the first studies and the first habits.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST STUDIES—THE SELF-EDUCATED ARE MARKED BY STUBBORN PECULIARITIES—THEIR ERRORS—THEIR IMPROVEMENT FROM THE NEGLECT OR CONTEMPT THEY INCUR—THE HISTORY OF SELF-EDUCATION IN MOSES MENDELSOHN—FRIENDS USUALLY PREJUDICIAL IN THE YOUTH OF GENIUS—A REMARKABLE INTERVIEW BETWEEN PETRARCH IN HIS FIRST STUDIES, AND HIS LITERARY ADVISER—EXHORTATION.

THE first studies form an epoch in the history of genius, and unquestionably have sensibly influenced its productions. Often have the first impressions stamped a character on the mind adapted to receive one, as the first step into life has often determined its walk. But this, for ourselves, is a far distant period in our existence, which is lost in the horizon of our own recollections, and is usually unobserved by others.

Many of those peculiarities of men of genius which are not fortunate, and some which have hardened the character in its mould, may, how-

ever, be traced to this period. Physicians tell us that there is a certain point in youth at which the constitution is formed, and on which the sanity of life revolves; the character of genius experiences a similar dangerous period. Early bad tastes, early peculiar habits, early defective instructions, all the egotistical pride of an untamed intellect, are those evil spirits which will dog genius to its grave. An early attachment to the works of Sir Thomas Browne produced in JOHNSON an excessive admiration of that Latinised English, which violated the native graces of the language; and the peculiar style of GIBBON is traced by himself "to the constant habit of speaking one language, and writing another." The first studies of REMBRANDT affected his after-labours; that peculiarity of shadow which marks all his pictures, originated in the circumstance of his father's mill receiving light from an aperture at the top, which habituated that artist afterwards to view all objects as if seen in that magical light: the intellectual POUSSIN, as Nicholas has been called, from an early devotion to the fine statues of antiquity, could never ex-

tricate his genius on the canvass from the hard forms of marble: he sculptured with his pencil; and that cold austerity of tone, still more remarkable in his last pictures, as it became mannered, chills the spectator on a first glance. When POPE was a child, he found in his mother's closet a small library of mystical devotion; but it was not suspected, till the fact was discovered, that the effusions of love and religion poured forth in his Eloisa, were caught from the seraphic raptures of those erotic mystics, who to the last retained a place in his library among the classical bards of antiquity. The accidental perusal of Quintus Curtius first made BOYLE, to use his own words, "in love with other than pedantic books, and conjured up in him an unsatisfied appetite of knowledge; so that he thought he owed more to Quintus Curtius than did Alexander." From the perusal of Rycaut's folio of Turkish history in childhood, the noble and impassioned bard of our times retained those indelible impressions which gave life and motion to the "Giaour," the "Corsair," and "Alp." A voyage to the country pro-

duced the scenery. Rycaut only communicated the impulse to a mind susceptible of the poetical character; and without this Turkish history we should still have had the poet*.

The influence of first studies, in the formation of the character of genius, is a moral phenomenon,

* I find in a copy of the second edition of this work, with a sight of which I have been favoured by the gentleman who possesses it, a manuscript note by Lord Byron on this passage. It cannot fail to interest the lovers of poetry, as well as the inquirers into the history of the human mind. His lordship's recollections of his first readings will not alter the tendency of my conjecture; it only proves that he had read much more of Eastern history and manners than Rycaut's folio, which probably led to this class of books.

"Knolles—Cantemir—De Tott—Lady M. W. Montagu—Hawkins's translation from Mignot's History of the Turks—The Arabian Nights—All travels or histories or books upon the East I could meet with, I had read, as well as Rycaut, before I was *ten years old*. I think the Arabian Nights first. After these I preferred the history of naval actions, Don Quixote, and Smollet's novels, particularly Roderick Random, and I was passionate for the Roman History.

"When a boy I could never bear to read any poetry whatever without disgust and reluctance."—*MS. note.*

which has not sufficiently attracted our notice. FRANKLIN acquaints us, that when young and wanting books, he accidentally found De Foe's "Essay on Projects," from which work impressions were derived which afterwards influenced some of the principal events of his life. The lectures of REYNOLDS probably originated in the essays of Richardson: it is acknowledged that these first made him a painter, and not long afterwards an author; it is said that many of the principles in his lectures may be traced in those first studies, which had left behind so many indelible and glowing impressions, caught from those bewildering pages of enthusiasm. Sir WALTER RAWLEIGH, according to a family tradition, when a young man, was perpetually reading and conversing on the discoveries of Columbus, and the conquests of Cortez and Pizarro: his character, as well as the great events of his life, seem to have been inspired by his favourite histories; to pass beyond the discoveries of the Spaniards became a passion, and he perished, a devoted victim to the vision of

his life. It is formally testified, that from a copy of Vegetius *de Re Militari*, in the school library of St. Paul's, MARLBOROUGH imbibed his passion for a military life. If he could not understand the text, the prints were, in such a mind, sufficient to awaken the passion for military glory. ROUSSEAU in early youth, full of his Plutarch, while he was also devouring the trash of romances, could only conceive human nature in the colossal forms, or be affected by the infirm sensibility of an imagination mastering all his faculties; thinking like a Roman, and feeling like a Sybarite. The same circumstance happened to CATHARINE MACAULEY, who herself has told us how she owed the bent of her character to the early reading of the Roman historians; but combining Roman admiration with English faction, she violated truth in her English characters, and exaggerated romance in the Roman. But the permanent effect of a solitary bias in the youth of genius, impelling the whole current of his after-life, is strikingly displayed in the remarkable character of Archdeacon BLACKBURNE, the author

of the famous "Confessional," and the curious "Memoirs of Hollis," written with such a republican fierceness.

I had long considered the character of our archdeacon as a *lusus politicus et theologicus*. Having subscribed to the articles, and enjoying the archdeaconry, he was writing against subscription and the whole hierarchy, with a spirit so irascible and caustic, as if, like Prynne and Bastwick, the archdeacon had already lost both his ears; while his antipathy to monarchy might have done honour to a Roundhead of the Rota Club. The secret of these volcanic explosions was only revealed in a letter accidentally preserved. In the youth of our spirited archdeacon, when fox-hunting was his deepest study, it happened at the house of a relation, that on a rainy day he fell, among other garret lumber, on some worm-eaten volumes which had once been the careful collections of his great-grandfather, an Oliverian justice. "These," says he, "I conveyed to my lodging-room, and there became acquainted with the manners and principles of many excellent old puritans, and then

laid the foundation of my own." The enigma is now solved! Archdeacon BLACKBURNE, in his seclusion in Yorkshire amidst the Oliverian justice's library, shows that we are in want of a Cervantes, but not of a Quixote, and Yorkshire might yet be as renowned a county as La Mancha; for political romances, it is presumed, may be as fertile of ridicule as any of the folios of chivalry.

Such is the influence through life of those first unobserved impressions on the character of genius, which every author has not recorded.

Education, however indispensable in a cultivated age, produces nothing on the side of genius; where education ends often genius begins. GRAY was asked if he recollected when he first felt the strong predilection to poetry; he replied, that "he believed it was when he began to read Virgil for his own amusement, and not in school hours as a task." Such is the force of self-education in genius, that the celebrated physiologist, JOHN HUNTER, who was entirely self-educated, evinced such penetration in his anatomical discoveries, that he has brought into notice passages from writers

he was unable to read, and which had been overlooked by profound scholars *.

That the education of genius must be its own work, we may appeal to every one of the family; it is not always fortunate, for many die amidst a waste of talents and the wrecks of their mind.

Many a soul sublime
Has felt the influence of malignant star.

An unfavourable position in society is an usual obstruction in the course of this self-education; and a man of genius, through half his life, has held a contest with a bad, or with no education. There is a race of the late-taught, who, with a capacity of leading in the first rank, are mortified to discover themselves only on a level with their contemporaries. WINKELMAN, who passed his youth in obscure misery as a village schoolmaster, paints feelings which strikingly contrast with his avocations. "I formerly filled the office of a schoolmaster with the greatest punctuality; and I taught

* Life of John Hunter, by Dr. Adams, p. 59, where the case is curiously illustrated.

the A, B, C, to children with filthy heads, at the moment I was aspiring after the knowledge of the beautiful, and meditating, low to myself, on the similes of Homer; then I said to myself, as I still say, 'Peace, my soul, thy strength shall surmount thy cares.'" The obstructions of so unhappy a self-education essentially injured his ardent genius, and long he secretly sorrowed at this want of early patronage, and these discordant habits of life. "I am unfortunately one of those whom the Greeks named ὀψίμαθεις; *sero sapientes*, the late-learned, for I have appeared too late in the world and in Italy. To have done something, it was necessary that I should have had an education analogous to my pursuits, and at your age." This class of the *late-learned* is a useful distinction: it is so with a sister-art; one of the greatest musicians of our country assures me, that the ear is as latent with many; there are the late-learned even in the musical world. BUDÆUS declared that he was both "self-taught and late-taught."

The SELF-EDUCATED are marked by stubborn peculiarities. Often abounding with talent, but

rarely in its place, their native prodigality has to dread a plethora of genius and a delirium of wit; while others, hard but irregular students, rich in acquisition, find how their huddled knowledge, like corn heaped in a granary, for want of ventilation and stirring, perishes in its own masses. Not having attended to the process of their own minds, and little acquainted with that of other men, they cannot throw out their intractable knowledge, nor with sympathy, awaken by its softening touches the thoughts of others. To conduct their native impulse, which had all along driven them, is a secret not always discovered, or discovered late in life. Hence it has happened with some of this race, that their first work has not announced genius, and their last is stamped with it. Some are often judged by their first work, and when they have surpassed themselves, it is long ere it is acknowledged. They have improved themselves by the very neglect or even contempt which their unfortunate efforts were doomed to meet; and when once they have learnt what is beautiful, they discover a living but unsuspected source in

their own wild but unregarded originality. Glorying in their strength at the time that they are betraying their weakness, yet still mighty in that enthusiasm which is only disciplined by its own fierce habits. Never can the native faculty of genius with its creative warmth be crushed out of the human soul; it will work itself out beneath the encumbrance of the most uncultivated minds, even amidst those deep perplexed feelings and tumultuous thoughts of the most visionary enthusiast, who is often only a man of genius misplaced *. We may find a whole race of these self-taught among the unknown writers of the old romances, and the ancient ballads of European nations; there sleep many a Homer and Virgil—legitimate heirs of their genius though possessors

* "One assertion I will venture to make, as suggested by my own experience, that there exist folios on the human understanding and the nature of man which would have a far juster claim to their high rank and celebrity, if in the whole huge volume there could be found as much fulness of heart and intellect as burst forth in many a simple page of George Fox and Jacob Behmen." Mr. Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, i. 143.

of decayed estates. BUNYAN is the Spenser of the people. The fire burned towards Heaven, although the altar was rude and rustic.

BARRY, the painter, has left behind him works not to be turned over by the connoisseur by rote, nor the artist who dares not be just. That enthusiast, with a temper of mind resembling Rousseau's, but with coarser feelings, was the same creature of untamed imagination consumed by the same passions, with the same fine intellect disordered, and the same fortitude of soul; but he found his self-taught pen, like his pencil, betray his genius. A vehement enthusiasm breaks through his ill-composed works, throwing the sparks of his bold conceptions into the soul of the youth of genius. When in his character of professor, he delivered his lectures at the academy, at every pause his auditors rose in a tumult, and at every close their hands returned to him the proud feelings he adored. This gifted but self-educated man, once listening to the children of genius whom he had created about him, exclaimed, "Go it, go it, my boys! they did so at Athens."

many live with all the restrictions of their ceremonial law in an insulated state, and are not always instructed in the language of the country of their birth. They employ for their common intercourse a barbarous or *patois* Hebrew; while the sole studies of the young rabbins are strictly confined to the Talmud of which the fundamental principle, like the Sonna of the Turks, is a pious rejection of every species of profane learning. This ancient jealous spirit, which walls in the understanding and the faith of man, was shutting out what the imitative Catholics afterwards called heresy. It is, then, these numerous folios of the Talmud which the true Hebraic student contemplates through all the seasons of life, as the Patuecos in their low valley imagine their surrounding mountains to be the confines of the universe.

Of such a nature was the plan of MENDELSOHN'S first studies; but even in his boyhood this conflict of study occasioned an agitation of his spirits, which affected his life ever after: rejecting the Talmudical dreamers, he caught a nobler spirit

from the celebrated Maimonides; and his native sagacity was already clearing up the darkness around. An enemy not less hostile to the enlargement of mind than voluminous legends, presented itself in the indigence of his father, who was now compelled to send away the youth on foot to Berlin, to find labour and bread.

At Berlin he becomes an amanuensis to another poor rabbin, who could only still initiate him into the theology, the jurisprudence, and the scholastic philosophy of his people. Thus, he was no farther advanced in that philosophy of the mind in which he was one day to be the rival of Plato and Locke, nor in that knowledge of literature which was to place him among the first polished critics of Germany.

Some unexpected event occurs which gives the first great impulse to the mind of genius. MENDELSOHN received this from the companion of his misery and his studies, a man of congenial but maturer powers. He was a Polish Jew, expelled from the communion of the orthodox, and the calumniated student was now a vagrant, with more

sensibility than fortitude. But this vagrant was a philosopher, a poet, a naturalist, and a mathematician. MENDELSOHN, at a distant day, never alluded to him without tears. Thrown together into the same situation, they approached each other by the same sympathies, and communicating in the only language which MENDELSOHN knew, the Polander voluntarily undertook his literary education.

Then was seen one of the most extraordinary spectacles in the history of modern literature. Two houseless Hebrew youths might be discovered, in the moonlight streets of Berlin, sitting in retired corners, or on the steps of some porch, the one instructing the other, with an Euclid in his hand; but what is more extraordinary, it was a Hebrew version, composed by himself, for one who knew no other language. Who could then have imagined that the future Plato of Germany was sitting on those steps!

The Polander, whose deep melancholy had settled on his heart, died—yet he had not lived in vain, since the electric spark that lighted up

the soul of MENDELSOHN had fallen from his own.

MENDELSOHN was now left alone; his mind teeming with its chaos, and still master of no other language than that barren idiom which was incapable of expressing the ideas he was meditating on. He had scarcely made a step into the philosophy of his age, and the genius of MENDELSOHN had probably been lost to Germany, had not the singularity of his studies and the cast of his mind been detected by the sagacity of Dr. Kisch. The aid of this physician was momentous; for he devoted several hours every day to the instruction of a poor youth, whose strong capacity he had the discernment to perceive, and the generous temper to aid. MENDELSOHN was soon enabled to read Locke in a Latin version; but with such extreme pain, that, compelled to search for every word, and to arrange their Latin order, and at the same time to combine metaphysical ideas, it was observed that he did not so much translate, as guess by the force of meditation.

This prodigious effort of his intellect retarded

his progress, but invigorated his habit, as the racer, by running against the hill, at length courses with facility.

A succeeding effort was to master the living languages, and chiefly the English, that he might read his favourite Locke in his own idiom. Thus a great genius for metaphysics and languages was forming itself, by itself.

It is curious to detect, in the character of genius, the effects of local and moral influences. There resulted from MENDELSOHN's early situation, certain defects in his Jewish education, and his numerous impediments in literature. Inheriting but one language, too obsolete and naked to serve the purposes of modern philosophy, he perhaps overvalued his new acquisitions, and in his delight of knowing many languages, he with difficulty escaped from remaining a mere philologist; while in his philosophy, having adopted the prevailing principles of Wolf and Baumgarten, his genius was long without the courage or the skill to emancipate itself from their rusty chains. It was more than a step which had brought him into their

circle, but a step was yet wanting to escape from it.

At length the mind of MENDELSOHN enlarged in literary intercourse: he became a great and original thinker in many beautiful speculations in moral and critical philosophy; while he had gradually been creating a style which the critics of Germany have declared was their first luminous model of precision and elegance. Thus a Hebrew vagrant, first perplexed in the voluminous labyrinth of Judaical learning, in his middle age oppressed by indigence and malady, and in his mature life wrestling with that commercial station whence he derived his humble independence, became one of the master-writers in the literature of his country. The history of the mind of MENDELSOHN is one of the noblest pictures of the self-education of genius.

Friends, whose prudential counsels in the business of life are valuable in our youth, are usually prejudicial in the youth of genius. The multitude of authors and artists originates in the ignorant admiration of their early friends; while the real

genius has often been disconcerted and thrown into despair, by the false judgments of his domestic circle. The productions of taste are more unfortunate than those which depend on a chain of reasoning, or the detail of facts; these are more palpable to the common judgments of men; but taste is of such rarity, that a long life may be passed by some without once obtaining a familiar acquaintance with a mind so cultivated by knowledge, so tried by experience, and so practised by converse with the literary world, that its prophetic feeling anticipates the public opinion. When a young writer's first essay is shown, some through mere inability of censure, see nothing but beauties; others, with equal imbecility, can see none; and others, out of pure malice, see nothing but faults. "I was soon disgusted," says GIBBON, "with the modest practice, of reading the manuscript to my friends. Of such friends some will praise for politeness, and some will criticise for vanity." Had several of our first writers set their fortunes on the cast of their friends' opinions, we might have lost some precious compositions. The friends of

THOMSON discovered nothing but faults in his early productions, one of which happened to be his noblest, the "Winter;" they just could discern that these abounded with luxuriances, without being aware that they were the luxuriances of a poet. He had created a new school in art—and appealed from his circle to the public. From a manuscript letter of our poet's, written when employed on his "Summer," I transcribe his sentiments on his former literary friends in Scotland —he is writing to Mallet*: "Far from defending these two lines, I damn them to the lowest depth of the poetical Tophet, prepared of old, for Mitchell, Morrice, Rook, Cook, Beckingham, and a long &c. Wherever I have evidence, or think I have evidence, which is the same thing, I'll be as obstinate as all the mules in Persia." This poet of warm affections felt so irritably the perverse criticisms of his learned friends, that they were to share alike, nothing less than a damnation to a poetical hell. One of these "blasts" broke

* In Mr. Murray's collection of autographical letters.

out in a vindictive epigram on Mitchell, whom he describes with a "blasted eye;" but this critic having one literally, the poet, to avoid a personal reflection, could only consent to make the blemish more active—

> "Why all not faults, injurious Mitchell! why
> Appears one beauty to thy *blasting* eye?"

He again calls him "the planet-blasted Mitchell." Of another of these critical friends he speaks with more sedateness, but with a strong conviction that the critic, a very sensible man, had no sympathy with the poet. "Aikman's reflections on my writings are very good, but he does not in them regard the turn of my genius enough; should I alter my way I would write poorly. I must choose what appears to me the most significant epithet, or I cannot, with any heart, proceed." The "Mirror," when published in Edinburgh, was "fastidiously" received, as all "home-productions" are; but London avenged the cause of the author. When Swift introduced PARNEL to Lord Bolingbroke, and to the world,

he observes, in his Journal, "it is pleasant to see one who hardly passed for any thing in Ireland, make his way here with a little friendly forwarding." MONTAIGNE has honestly told us, that in his own province, they considered that for him to attempt to become an author was perfectly ludicrous; at home, says he, "I am compelled to purchase printers, while at a distance, printers purchase me." There is nothing more trying to the judgment of the friends of a young man of genius, than the invention of a new manner: without a standard to appeal to, without bladders to swim, the ordinary critic sinks into irretrievable distress; but usually pronounces against novelty. When REYNOLDS returned from Italy, warm with all the excellence of his art, says Mr. Northcote, and painted a portrait, his old master Hudson viewing it, and perceiving no trace of his own manner, exclaimed that he did not paint so well as when he left England; while another, who conceived no higher excellence than Kneller, treated with signal contempt the future Raphael of England.

If it be dangerous for a young writer to resign

himself to the opinions of his friends, he also incurs some peril in passing them with inattention. He wants a Quintilian. One means to obtain such an invaluable critic, is the cultivation of his own judgment in a round of reading and meditation; let him at once supply the marble and be himself the sculptor: let the great authors of the world be his gospels, and the best critics their expounders; from the one he will draw inspiration, and from the others he will supply those tardy discoveries in art, which he who solely depends on his own experience may obtain too late. Those who do not read criticism will rarely merit to be criticised; that would be the progress of a traveller without a map of the country. The more extensive an author's knowledge of what has been done, the greater will be his powers in knowing what to do: to obtain originality and discovery sometimes requires but a single step, if we know from what point to set forwards. This important event in the life of genius has too often depended on chance and good fortune, and many have gone down to their graves without having discovered their unsus-

pected talent. CURRAN's predominant faculty was an exuberance of imagination when excited by passion; but when young he gave no evidence of this peculiar faculty, nor for several years, while a candidate for public distinction was he aware of his particular powers; so slowly his imagination had developed itself: it was, when assured of the secret of his strength, that his confidence, his ambition, and his industry were excited.

Let the youth preserve his juvenile compositions, whatever these may be; they are the spontaneous growth and like the plants of the Alps not always found in other soils; they are his virgin fancies: by contemplating them he may detect some of his predominant habits,—resume a former manner more happily,—invent novelty from an old subject he had rudely designed,—and often may steal from himself some inventive touches, which, thrown into his most finished compositions, may seem a happiness rather than an art. It was in contemplating on some of their earliest and unfinished productions, that more than one artist discovered with WEST, that "there were in-

ventive touches of art in his first and juvenile essay, which, with all his subsequent knowledge and experience, he had not been able to surpass." A young writer, in the progress of his studies, should often recollect a fanciful simile of Dryden:

> "As those who unripe veins in mines explore,
> On the rich bed again the warm turf lay,
> Till time digests the yet imperfect ore;
> And know it will be gold another day."

The youth of genius is that "age of admiration" as sings the poet of "Human Life," when the spell breathed into our ear by our genius, fortunate or unfortunate, is—"Aspire!" Then we adore art, and the artists. It was RICHARDSON's enthusiasm which gave REYNOLDS the raptures he caught in meditating on the description of a great painter; and REYNOLDS thought RAPHAEL the most extraordinary man the world had ever produced. WEST, when a youth, exclaimed, that "A painter is a companion for kings and emperors!" Such was the feeling which rendered the thoughts of obscurity painful and insupportable to their young minds.

But this sunshine of rapture is not always spread over the spring of the youthful year. There is a season of self-contest, a period of tremors, and doubts, and darkness. These frequent returns of melancholy, sometimes of despondence, which is the lot of inexperienced genius, is a secret history of the heart, which has been finely conveyed to us by Petrarch, in a conversation with John of Florence, to whom the young poet often resorted when dejected, to reanimate his failing powers, to confess his faults, and to confide to him his dark and wavering resolves. It was a question with him whether he should not turn away from the pursuit of literary fame, by giving another direction to his life.

"I went one day to John of Florence in one of those ague-fits of faint-heartedness which often happened to me: he received me with his accustomed kindness. 'What ails you?' said he; 'you seem oppressed with thought: if I am not deceived, something has happened to you.'—'You do not deceive yourself, my father (for thus I used to call him), and yet nothing newly has hap-

advise me. Shall I for ever quit my studies? Shall I strike into some new course of life? My father, have pity on me! draw me out of the frightful state in which I am lost.' I could proceed no further without shedding tears. 'Cease to afflict yourself, my son,' said that good man; 'your condition is not so bad as you think: the truth is, you knew little at the time you imagined you knew much. The discovery of your ignorance is the first great step you have made towards true knowledge. The veil is lifted up, and you now view those deep shades of the soul which were concealed from you by excessive presumption. In ascending an elevated spot, we gradually discover many things whose existence before was not suspected by us. Persevere in the career which you entered with my advice; feel confident that God will not abandon you: there are maladies which the patient does not perceive; but to be aware of the disease, is the first step towards the cure*.''

* Memoires pour la Vie de Petrarque, par L'Abbé Sade, Vol. I. p. 92.

This remarkable literary interview is here given, that it may perchance meet the eye of some kindred youth at one of those lonely moments when a Shakspeare may have thought himself no poet, and a Raphael believed himself no painter. Then may the tender wisdom of a John of Florence, in the cloudy despondency of art, lighten up the vision of its glory!

INGENUOUS YOUTH! if, in a constant perusal of the master-writers, you see your own sentiments anticipated, and in the tumult of your mind, as it comes in contact with theirs, new ones arise; if, sometimes, looking on the public favourite of the hour, you feel that within that prompts you to imagine that you could rival or surpass it; if, in meditating on the confessions of every man of genius, for they have all their confessions, you have experienced the same sensations from the same circumstances, encountered the same difficulties and overcome them by the same means, —then let not your courage be lost in your admiration,—but listen to that "still small voice"

in your heart, which cries with CORREGIO and with MONTESQUIEU, "Ed io anche son pittore*!"

* This noble consciousness with which the Italian painter gave utterance to his strong feelings on viewing a celebrated picture by one of his rivals, is applied by Montesquieu to himself at the close of the preface to his great work.

CHAPTER VII.

OF THE IRRITABILITY OF GENIUS—GENIUS IN SOCIETY OFTEN IN A STATE OF SUFFERING—EQUALITY OF TEMPER MORE PREVALENT AMONG MEN OF LETTERS—OF THE OCCUPATION OF MAKING A GREAT NAME—ANXIETIES OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL—OF THE INVENTORS—WRITERS OF LEARNING—WRITERS OF TASTE—ARTISTS.

THE modes of life of a man of genius, often tinctured by eccentricity and enthusiasm, maintain an eternal conflict with the monotonous and imitative habits of society, as society is carried on in a great metropolis, where men are necessarily alike, and in perpetual intercourse, shaping themselves to one another.

The occupations, the amusements, and the ardour of the man of genius, are at discord with the artificial habits of life: in the vortexes of business or the world of pleasure, crowds of human beings are only treading in one another's steps.

The pleasures and the sorrows of this active multitude are not his, while his are not obvious to them; and his favourite occupations strengthen his peculiarities and increase his sensibility. Genius in society is therefore often in a state of suffering. Professional characters, who are themselves so often literary, yielding to their predominant interests, conform to that assumed urbanity which levels them with ordinary minds; but the man of genius cannot leave himself behind in the cabinet he quits; the train of his thoughts is not stopped at will, and in the range of conversation the habits of his mind will prevail: the poet will sometimes muse till he modulates a verse; the artist is sketching what a moment presents, and a moment changes; the philosophical historian is suddenly absorbed by a new combination of thought, and, placing his hands over his eyes, is thrown back into the middle ages. Thus it happens that an excited imagination, a high-toned feeling, a wandering reverie, a restlessness of temper, are perpetually carrying the man of genius out of the processional line of the mere conversationists.

Like all solitary beings, he is much too sentient, and prepares for defence even at a random touch or a chance hit. His generalising views take things only in masses, while in his rapid emotions he interrogates, and doubts, and is caustic; in a word, he thinks he converses, while he is at his studies. Sometimes, apparently a complacent listener, we are mortified by detecting the absent man: now he appears humbled and spiritless, ruminating over some failure which probably may be only known to himself, and now haughty and hardy for a triumph he has obtained, which yet remains as secret to the world. No man is so apt to indulge the extremes of the most opposite feelings: he is sometimes insolent, and sometimes querulous; now the soul of tenderness and tranquillity, view him stung by jealousy, or writhing in aversion! A fever shakes his spirit; a fever which has sometimes generated a disease, and has even produced a slight perturbation of the faculties *.

* I have given a history of *literary quarrels from personal motives,* in Quarrels of Authors, Vol. III. p. 285. There we find how many controversies, in which

In one of those manuscript notes by Lord BYRON on this work which I have wished to preserve, I find his lordship observing on the feelings of genius, that "the depreciation of the lowest of mankind is more painful than the applause of the highest is pleasing." Such is the confession of genius, and such its liability to hourly pain.

Once we were nearly receiving from the hand of genius the most curious sketches of the temper,

the public get involved, have sprung from some sudden squabble, some neglect of petty civility, some unlucky epithet, or some casual observation dropped without much consideration, which mortified or enraged the *genus irritabile;* a title which from ancient days has been assigned to every description of authors. The late Dr. WELLS, who had some experience in his intercourse with many literary characters, observed, that "In whatever regards the fruits of their mental labours, this is universally acknowledged to be true. Some of the malevolent passions indeed frequently become in learned men more than ordinarily strong, from want of that restraint upon their excitement which society imposes." A puerile critic has reproached me for having drawn my description entirely from my own fancy:—I have taken it from life! See further symptoms of this disease at the close of the chapter on *Self-praise* in the present work.

the irascible humours, the delicacy of soul, even to its shadowiness, from the warm *sboxzos* of BURNS when he began a diary of the heart,—a narrative of characters and events, and a chronology of his emotions. It was natural for such a creature of sensation and passion to project such a regular task, but quite impossible to get through it. The paper-book that he conceived would have recorded all these things, therefore, turns out but a very imperfect document. Even that little it was not thought proper to give entire. Yet there we view a warm original mind, when he first stepped into the polished circles of society, discovering that he could no longer "pour out his bosom, his every thought and floating fancy, his very inmost soul, with unreserved confidence to another, without hazard of losing part of that respect which man deserves from man; or, from the unavoidable imperfections attending human nature, of one day repenting his confidence." This was the first lesson he learnt at Edinburgh, and it was as a substitute for such a human being, that he bought a paper-book to keep under lock and key; "a se-

curity at least equal," says he, "to the bosom of any friend whatever." Let the man of genius pause over the fragments of this "paper-book;" it will instruct as much as any open confession of a criminal at the moment he is about to suffer. No man was more afflicted with that miserable pride, the infirmity of men of imagination, which is so jealously alive, even among their best friends, as to exact a perpetual acknowledgment of their powers. Our poet, with all his gratitude and veneration for "the noble Glencairn," was "wounded to the soul" because his lordship showed "so much attention, engrossing attention, to the only blockhead at table; the whole company consisted of his lordship, Dunderpate, and myself." This Dunderpate, who dined with Lord Glencairn, might have been an useful citizen; who, in some points, is of more value than an irritable bard. BURNS was equally offended with another patron, who was also a literary brother, Dr. BLAIR. At the moment he too appeared to be neglecting the irritable poet—"for the mere carcass of greatness —or when his eye measured the difference of their

point of elevation; I say to myself, with scarcely any emotion," (he might have added, except a good deal of painful contempt,) "what do I care for him or his pomp either?"—"Dr. BLAIR's vanity is proverbially known among his acquaintance," adds BURNS, at the moment that the solitary haughtiness of his own genius had entirely escaped his self-observation. This character of genius is not singular. Grimm tells of MARIVAUX, that though a good man, there was something dark and suspicious in his character, which made it difficult to keep on terms with him; the most innocent word would wound him, and he was always inclined to think that there was an intention to mortify him: this disposition made him unhappy, and rendered his acquaintance too painful to endure.

What a moral paradox, but an unquestionable fact, is the wayward irritability of some of the finest geniuses, which is often weak to effeminacy, and capricious to childishness—while minds of a less delicacy of texture are not frayed and fretted by casual frictions; and plain sense with a coarser

grain, is sufficient to keep down these aberrations of their feelings, how mortifying is the list of—

"Fears of the brave and follies of the wise!"

Many have been sore and implacable on an allusion to some personal defect—on the obscurity of their birth—on some peculiarity of habit; and have suffered themselves to be governed in life by nervous whims and chimeras, equally fantastic and trivial. This morbid sensibility lurks in the temperament of genius, and the infection is often discovered where it is not always suspected. Cumberland declared that the sensibility of some men of genius is so quick and captious, that you must first consider whom they can be happy with, before you can promise yourself any happiness with them: if you bring uncongenial humours into contact with each other, all the objects of society will be frustrated by inattention to the proper grouping of the guests. Look round on our contemporaries; every day furnishes facts which confirm our principle. Among the vexations of POPE

was the libel of "the pictured shape;" and even the robust mind of JOHNSON could not suffer to be exhibited as "blinking Sam." MILTON must have delighted in contemplating his own person; and the engraver not having reached our sublime bard's ideal grace, he has pointed his indignation in four iambics. The praise of a skipping ape raised the feeling of envy in that child of nature and genius, GOLDSMITH. VOITURE, the son of a vintner, like our PRIOR, was so mortified whenever reminded of his original occupation, that it was said of him, that wine, which cheered the hearts of all men, sickened the heart of Voiture. AKENSIDE ever considered his lameness as an insupportable misfortune, for it continually reminded him of the fall of the cleaver from one of his father's blocks. BECCARIA invited to Paris by the literati, arrived melancholy and silent—and abruptly returned home. At that moment this great man was most miserable from a fit of jealousy of a young woman; which had extinguished all his philosophy. The poet ROUSSEAU was the son of

a cobbler; and when his honest parent waited at the door of the theatre to embrace his son on the success of his first piece, genius, whose sensibility is not always virtuous, repulsed the venerable father with insult and contempt. But I will no longer proceed from folly to crime!

Those who give so many sensations to others must themselves possess an excess and a variety of feelings; we find, indeed, that they are censured for their extreme irritability; and that happy equality of temper, so prevalent among MEN OF LETTERS, and which is conveniently acquired by men of the world, has been usually refused to great mental powers, or to fervid dispositions—authors and artists. The man of wit becomes petulant, the profound thinker morose, and the vivacious ridiculously thoughtless.

When ROUSSEAU once retired to a village, he had to learn to endure its conversation; for this purpose he was compelled to invent an expedient to get rid of his uneasy sensations. "Alone, I have never known ennui, even when perfectly unoccupied; my imagination, filling the void, was

sufficient to busy me. It is only the inactive chit-chat of the room, when every one is seated face to face, and only moving their tongues, which I never could support. There to be a fixture, nailed with one hand on the other, to settle the state of the weather, or watch the flies about one, or, what is worse, to be bandying compliments, this to me is not bearable." He hit on the expedient of making lace-strings, carrying his working cushion in his visits, to keep the peace with the country gossips.

Is the occupation of making a great name less anxious and precarious than that of making a great fortune? the progress of a man's capital is unequivocal to him, but that of the fame of authors and artists is for the greater part of their lives of an ambiguous nature. They become whatever the minds or knowledge of others make them; they are the creatures of the prejudices and the predispositions of others, and must suffer from those precipitate judgments which are the result of such prejudices and such predispositions. Time only is the certain friend of

literary worth, for Time makes the world disagree among themselves; and when those who condemn discover that there are others who approve, the weaker party loses itself in the stronger, and at length they learn, that the author was far more reasonable than their prejudices had allowed them to conceive. It is thus, however, that the regard men of genius find in one place they lose in another. We may often smile at the local gradations of genius; the fervid esteem in which an author is held here, and the cold indifference, if not contempt, he encounters there: here the man of learning is condemned as a heavy drone, and there the man of wit annoys the unwitty listener.

And are not the anxieties of even the most successful men of genius renewed at every work—often quitted in despair, often returned to with rapture; the same agitation of the spirits, the same poignant delight, the same weariness, the same dissatisfaction, the same querulous languishment after excellence? Is the man of genius an INVENTOR? the discovery is contested, or it is not comprehended for ten years after, or during his

whole life; even men of science are as children before him. Sir Thomas Bodley wrote to Lord Bacon, remonstrating with him on his *new mode of philosophising*. It seems the fate of all originality of thinking to be immediately opposed; a contemporary is not prepared for its comprehension, and too often cautiously avoids it, from the prudential motive which turns away from a new and solitary path. BACON was not at all understood at home in his own day; his reputation—for it was not celebrity—was confined to his history of Henry VII., and his Essays; it was long after his death before English writers ventured to quote Bacon as an authority; and with equal simplicity and grandeur, BACON called himself, "the servant of Posterity." MONTESQUIEU gave his *Esprit des Loix* to be read by that man in France, whom he conceived to be the best judge, and in return received the most mortifying remarks. The great philosopher exclaimed in despair, "I see my own age is not ripe enough to understand my work; however, it shall be published!" When KEPLER published the first rational work on comets, it

was condemned even by the learned, as a wild dream. COPERNICUS so much dreaded the prejudice of mankind against his treatise on "The Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies," that, by a species of continence of all others most difficult to a philosopher, says Adam Smith, he detained it in his closet for thirty years together. LINNÆUS once in despair abandoned his beloved studies, from a too irritable feeling of the ridicule in which, as it appeared to him, a professor Siegesbeck had involved his famous system: penury, neglect, and labour, LINNÆUS could endure, but that his botany should become the object of ridicule for all Stockholm, shook the nerves of this great inventor in his science. Let him speak for himself. "No one cared how many sleepless nights and toilsome hours I had passed, while all with one voice declared, that Siegesbeck had annihilated me.—I took my leave of Flora, who bestows nothing on me but Siegesbecks; and condemned my too numerous observations a thousand times over to eternal oblivion.—What a fool have I been to waste so much time, to spend my days

and nights in a study which yields no better fruit, and makes me the laughing-stock of the world!" Such are the cries of the irritability of genius, and such are often the causes. The world was in danger of losing a new science, had not LINNÆUS returned to the discoveries he had forsaken in the madness of the mind! The great SYDENHAM, who like our HARVEY and our HUNTER, effected a revolution in the science of medicine, and led on alone by the independence of his genius attacked the most prevailing prejudices, so highly provoked the malignant emulation of his rivals, that a conspiracy was raised against the father of our modern practice to banish him out of the college, as "guilty of medical heresy." JOHN HUNTER was a great discoverer in his own science; but one who well knew him has told us, that few of his contemporaries perceived the ultimate object of his pursuits; and his strong and solitary genius laboured to perfect his designs without the solace of sympathy, without one cheering approbation. "We bees do not provide honey for ourselves," exclaimed VAN HELMONT, when

worn out by the toils of chemistry, and still contemplating, amidst tribulation and persecution, and himself about to die, his "Tree of Life," which he imagined he had discovered in the cedar. But with a sublime melancholy, his spirit breaks out; "My mind breathes some unheard-of thing within; though I, as unprofitable for this life, shall be buried!" Such were the mighty, but indistinct anticipations of this visionary inventor, the father of modern chemistry!

I cannot quit this short record of the fates of the inventors in science, without adverting to another cause of that irritability of genius which is so closely connected with their pursuits. If we look into the history of theories, we shall be surprised at the vast number which have "not left a rack behind." And do we suppose that the inventors themselves were not at times alarmed by secret doubts of their soundness and stability? They felt, too often for their repose, that the noble architecture which they had raised might be built on moveable sands, and be found only in the dust of libraries; a cloudy day, or a fit of indi-

gestion, would deprive an inventor of his theory all at once, and as one of them said, "after dinner, all that I have written in the morning appears to me dark, incongruous, nonsensical." At such moments we should find this man of genius in no pleasant mood. The true cause of this nervous state cannot, nay, must not, be confided to the world: the honour of his darling theory will always be dearer to his pride than the confession of even slight doubts which may shake its truth. It is a curious fact which we have but recently discovered, that ROUSSEAU was disturbed by a terror he experienced, and which we well know was not unfounded, that his theories of education were false and absurd. He could not endure to read a page in his own Emile * without disgust after the work had been published! He acknowledged that there were more suffrages against his notions than for them. "I am not displeased," says he, "with myself on the style and eloquence, but I still dread that my writings are good for nothing at the

* In a letter by Hume to Blair, written in 1766, apparently first published in the Literary Gazette, Nov. 17, 1821.

bottom, and that all my theories are full of extravagance.—*Je crains toujours que je peche par le fond, et que touts mes systêmes ne sont que des extravagances.*" HARTLEY with his "Vibrations and vibratiuncules," LEIBNITZ with his "Monads," CUDWORTH with his "Plastic Natures," MALEBRANCHE with his paradoxical doctrine of "Seeing all things in God," and BURNET with his heretical "Theory of the Earth," must unquestionably at times have betrayed an irritability which those about them may have attributed to temper, rather than to genius.

Is our man of genius—not the victim of fancy, but the slave of truth—a learned author? Of the living waters of human knowledge it cannot be said that "If a man drink thereof, he shall never thirst again." What volumes remain to open! what manuscript but makes his heart palpitate! There is no term in researches which new facts may alter, and a single date may dissolve. Truth! thou fascinating, but severe mistress, thy adorers are often broken down in thy servitude, performing a thousand un-

regarded task-works! Now winding thee through thy labyrinth with a single thread, often unravelling—now feeling their way in darkness, doubtful if it be thyself they are touching! How much of the real labour of genius and erudition must remain concealed from the world, and never be reached by their penetration! MONTESQUIEU has described this feeling after its agony: "I thought I should have killed myself these three months to finish a *morceau* (for his great work) which I wished to insert on the origin and revolutions of the civil laws in France. You will read it in three hours; but I do assure you that it cost me so much labour, that it has whitened my hair." Mr. Hallam, stopping to admire the genius of GIBBON, exclaims, "In this, as in many other places, the masterly boldness and precision of his outline, which astonish those who have trodden parts of the same field, is apt to escape an uninformed reader." Thrice has my learned friend, SHARON TURNER, recomposed, with renewed researches, the history of our ancestors, of which Milton and Hume had

despaired—thrice, amidst the self-contests of ill-health and professional duties!

The man of erudition in closing his elaborate work is still exposed to the fatal omissions of wearied vigilance, or the accidental knowledge of some inferior mind, and always to the reigning taste, whatever it chance to be, of the public. BURNET criticised VARILLAS unsparingly; but when he wrote history himself, Harmer's "Specimen of Errors in Burnet's History" returned Burnet the pangs which he had inflicted on another. NEWTON's favourite work was his "Chronology," which he had written over fifteen times, yet desisted from its publication during his life-time from the ill-usage of which he complained. Even the "Optics" of Newton had no character at home till noticed in France. The calm temper of our great philosopher was of so fearful a nature in regard to criticism, that Whiston declares that he would not publish his attack on the Chronology, lest it might have killed our philosopher; as Bishop STILLINGFLEET's end was hastened by LOCKE's confutation of his metaphysics. The feelings of Sir JOHN

MARSHAM could hardly be less irritable when he found his great work tainted by an accusation that it was not friendly to revelation. When the learned POCOCK published a specimen of his translation of Abulpharagius, an Arabian historian, in 1649, it excited great interest; but in 1663, when he gave the world the complete version, it met with no encouragement: in the course of those thirteen years, the genius of the times had changed, and Oriental studies were no longer in request. The great VERULAM profoundly felt the retardment of his fame; for he has pathetically expressed this sentiment in his testament, where he bequeaths his name to posterity, AFTER SOME GENERATIONS SHALL BE PAST. BRUCE sunk into his grave defrauded of that just fame which his pride and vivacity perhaps too keenly prized, at least for his happiness, and which he authoritatively exacted from an unwilling public. Mortified and indignant at the reception of his great labour by the cold-hearted scepticism of little minds, and the maliciousness of idling wits, he whose fortitude had toiled through a life of difficulty and

danger, could not endure the laugh and scorn of public opinion—for BRUCE there was a simoom more dreadful than the Arabian, and from which genius cannot hide its head. Yet BRUCE only met with the fate which MARCO POLO had encountered; whose contemporaries had contemned his faithful narrative, and who was long thrown aside among legendary writers. HARVEY, though his life was prolonged to his eightieth year, hardly lived to see his great discovery of the circulation of the blood established: no physician adopted it; and when at length it was received, one party attempted to rob Harvey of the honour of the discovery, while another asserted that it was so obvious, that they could only express astonishment it had ever escaped observation. Incredulity and envy are the evil spirits which have often dogged great inventors to their tomb, and there only have vanished.—But I seem writing the "calamities of authors," and have only began the catalogue.

The reputation of a writer of taste is subject to more difficulties than any other. Similar was the fate of the finest ode writers in our poetry: on

their publication, the odes of COLLINS could find no readers; and those of GRAY, though ushered into the reading-world by the fashionable press of Walpole, were condemned as failures. When RACINE produced his "Athalie," it was not at all relished: Boileau indeed declared that he understood these matters better than the public, and prophesied that the public would return to it;—they did so, but it was sixty years afterwards, and Racine died without suspecting that "Athalie" was his master-piece. I have heard one of our great poets regret that he had devoted so much of his life to the cultivation of his art, which arose from a project made in the golden vision of his youth; "At a time," said he, "when I thought that the fountain could never be dried up." "Your baggage will reach posterity," was observed. "There is much to spare," was the answer. Every day we may observe, of a work of genius, that those parts which have all the raciness of the soil, and as such are most liked by its admirers, are those which are the most criticised. Modest critics shelter themselves under that general amnesty

too freely granted, that tastes are allowed to differ; but we should approximate much nearer to the truth, if we say, that but few of mankind are prepared to relish the beautiful with that enlarged taste which comprehends all the forms of feeling which genius may assume; forms which may be necessarily associated with defects. A man of genius composes in a state of intellectual emotion, and the magic of his style consists of the movements of the soul; but the art of conducting those movements is long separate from the feeling which inspires them. The idea in the mind is not always found under the pen, no more than the artist's conception can always breathe in his pencil. Like FIAMINGO's image, which he kept polishing till his friend exclaimed, "What perfection would you have?" "Alas!" exclaimed the sculptor, "the original I am labouring to come up to is in my head, but not yet in my hand." The writer toils, and repeatedly toils, to throw into our minds that sympathy with which we hang over the illusion of his pages, and become himself,

Ariosto wrote sixteen different ways the celebrated stanza descriptive of a tempest, as appears by his MSS. at Ferrara; and the version he preferred was the last of the sixteen. We know that Petrarch made forty-four alterations of a single verse; "whether for the thought, the expression, or the harmony, it is evident that as many operations in the heart, the head, or the ear of the poet occurred," observes a man of genius, Ugo Foscolo. Quintilian and Horace dread an author being too fond of his compositions: alteration is not always improvement. A picture over-finished fails in its effect; if the hand of the artist cannot leave it, how much beauty may it undo! yet still he is lingering, still strengthening the weak, still subduing the daring, still searching for that single idea which awakens so many in the minds of others, while often, as it once happened, the dash of despair hangs the foam on the horse's nostrils. I have known a great sculptor, who for twenty years delighted himself with forming in his mind the nymph

his hand was always creating. How rapturously he beheld her! what inspiration! what illusion! Alas! the last five years spoilt the beautiful which he had once reached, and could not stop and finish! The art of composition is of such slow attainment, that a man of genius, late in life, may discover how its secret conceals itself in the habit; that discipline consists of exercise, perfection comes from experience, and unity is the last effort of judgment. When Fox meditated on a history which should last with the language, he met his evil genius in this new province: the rapidity and the fire of his elocution were extinguished by a pen unconsecrated by long and previous study; he saw that he could not class with the great historians of every great people; he complained, while he mourned over the fragment of genius, which after such zealous preparation, he dared not complete. CURRAN, an orator of vehement eloquence, often strikingly original, when late in life he was desirous of cultivating literary composition, found his pen, unaccus-

tomed to its more gradual march, cold, and destitute of every grace. ROUSSEAU has glowingly described the ceaseless inquietude by which he obtained the seductive eloquence of his style; and has said, that with whatever talent a man may be born, the art of writing is not easily obtained. The existing manuscripts of ROUSSEAU display as many erasures as those we have noticed; they show his eagerness to set down his first thoughts, and his art to raise them to the impassioned style of his imagination. The memoir of GIBBON was composed seven or nine times, and, after all, was left unfinished; and BUFFON tells us that he wrote his *Epoques de la Nature* eighteen times before it satisfied his taste. BURNS's anxiety in finishing his poems was great; "all my poetry," says he, "is the effect of easy composition, but of laborious correction."

POPE, when employed on the Iliad, found it not only occupy his thoughts by day, but haunting his dreams by night, and once wished himself hanged, to get rid of Homer: and that he ex-

perienced often such literary agonies, witness his description of the depressions and elevations of genius;

" Who pants for glory, finds but short repose;
A breath revives him, or a breath o'erthrows!"

When ROMNEY undertook to commence the first subject for the Shakespeare Gallery, in the rapture of enthusiasm, amidst that sublime and pathetic labouring in his whole mind, arose the terror of failure. The subject chosen was "The Tempest;" and as Hayley truly observes, it created many a tempest in the fluctuating spirits of Romney. The vehement desire of that perfection which genius conceives, and cannot always execute, held a perpetual contest with that dejection of spirits which degrades the unhappy sufferer, and casts him, groveling among the mean of his class. In a national work a man of genius pledges his honour to the world for its performance; but in redeeming that pledge there is a darkness in the uncertain issue of his attempt, and he is risking his honour for ever. By that work he will always be judged, for public

failures are never forgotten, and it is not then a party, but the public itself who become his adversaries. With ROMNEY it was "a fever of the mad;" and his friends could scarcely inspire him with sufficient courage to proceed with his arduous picture, which exercised his imagination and his pencil for several years. I have heard that he built a painting-room purposely for this picture; and never did an anchorite pour forth a more fervent orison to Heaven, than Romney when this labour was complete. He had a fine genius, with all its solitary feelings, but he was uneducated, and incompetent even to write a letter; yet on this occasion, relieved from his intense anxiety under so long a work, he wrote one of the most eloquent. It is a document in the history of genius, and reveals all those feelings which are here too faintly described*. I once heard an

* "My dear friend;

"Your kindness in rejoicing so heartily at the birth of my picture, has given me great satisfaction.

"There has been an anxiety labouring in my mind the greatest part of the last twelvemonth. At times it

amiable author, whose literary career has perhaps not answered the fond hopes of his youth, half in anger and in love, declare that he would retire to some solitude, where, if any one would follow him, he would found a new order—the order of THE DISAPPOINTED.

Thus the days of a man of genius are passed in labours as unremitting and exhausting as those of the artisan. The world is not always aware, that to some, meditation, composition, and even conversation, may inflict pains undetected by the eye and the tenderness of friendship. Whenever ROUSSEAU passed a morning in society, it was observed, that in the evening he was dissatisfied and distressed; and JOHN HUNTER, in a mixed company, found that conversation fatigued, instead of amusing him. HAWKESWORTH, in the second paper of the Adventurer, has drawn, from his own

had nearly overwhelmed me. I thought I should absolutely have sunk into despair. O! what a kind friend is, in those times! I thank God, whatever my picture may be, I can say thus much,—I am a greater philosopher, and a better Christian."

feelings, an eloquent comparative estimate of intellectual with corporeal labour; it may console the humble mechanic: and Plato, in his work on laws, seems to have been aware of this analogy, for he consecrates all working men or artisans to Vulcan and Minerva, because both those deities alike are hard-workers. Yet with genius all does not terminate, even with the most skilful labour; what the toiling Vulcan, and the thoughtful Minerva may want, will too often be absent—the presence of the Graces. In the allegorical picture of the School of Design, by Carlo Maratti, where the students are led through their various studies, in the opening clouds above the academy are seen the Graces, hovering over their pupils, with an inscription they must often recollect,—*Senza di noi ogni fatica è vana.*

The anxious uncertainty of an author for his compositions resembles that of a lover when he has written to a mistress who has not yet decided on his claims; he repents his labour, for he thinks he has written too much, while he is mortified at recollecting that he had omitted some things which

he imagines would have secured the object of his wishes. Madame DE STAËL, who has often entered into feelings familiar to a literary and political family, in a parallel between ambition with genius, has distinguished them in this; that while "ambition *perseveres* in the desire of acquiring power, genius *flags* of itself. Genius in the midst of society is a pain, an internal fever which would require to be treated as a real disease, if the records of glory did not soften the sufferings it produces." "Athenians! what troubles have you not cost me," exclaimed DEMOSTHENES, "that I may be talked of by you!"

These moments of anxiety often darken the brightest hours of genius. RACINE had extreme sensibility; the pain inflicted by a severe criticism outweighed all the applause he received. He seems to have felt, what he was often reproached with, that his Greeks, his Jews, and his Turks were all inmates of Versailles. He had two critics, who, like our Dennis with Pope and Addison, regularly dogged his pieces as they appeared.

Corneille's objections he would attribute to jealousy—at his pieces when burlesqued at the Italian theatre, he would smile outwardly, though sick at heart;—but his son informs us, that a stroke of raillery from his witty friend Chapelle, whose pleasantry hardly sheathed its bitterness, sunk more deeply into his heart than the burlesques at the Italian theatre, the protest of Corneille, and the iteration of the two Dennises. More than once MOLIERE and RACINE, in vexation of spirit, resolved to abandon their dramatic career; it was BOILEAU who ceaselessly animated their languor: "Posterity," he cried, "will avenge the injustice of our age!" And CONGREVE's comedies met with such moderate success, that it appears the author was extremely mortified; and on the ill-reception of "The Way of the World," he determined to write no more for the stage. When he told Voltaire, on the French wit's visit, that Voltaire must consider him as a private gentleman, and not as an author, which apparent affectation called down on CONGREVE the sarcastic severity of the

French author, more of humility and mortification might have been in CONGREVE's language than of pride or affectation. The life of TASSO abounds with pictures of a complete exhaustion of this kind; his contradictory critics had perplexed him with the most intricate literary discussions, and either occasioned or increased a mental alienation. In one of his letters we find that he repents the composition of his great poem, for although his own taste approved of that marvellous, which still forms a noble part of its creation, yet he confesses that his cold reasoning critics have decided, that the history of his hero Godfrey required another species of conduct. "Hence," cries the unhappy bard, "doubts torment me; but for the past, and what is done, I know of no remedy;" and he longs to precipitate the publication, that "he may be delivered from misery and agony." He solemnly swears,—"did not the circumstances of my situation compel me, I would not print it, even perhaps during my life, I so much doubt of its success." Such was that painful state of fear and doubt experienced by the author of the "Jeru-

salem Delivered," when he gave it to the world; a state of suspense, among the children of imagination, in which none are more liable to participate, than the too sensitive artist. We may now inspect the severe correction of his muse, in the fac-simile of a page of Tasso's manuscripts in Mr. Dibdin's late Tour; she seems to have inflicted tortures on his pen, surpassing even those which may be seen in the fac-simile page which, thirty years ago, I gave of Pope's Homer. At Florence may still be viewed the many works begun and abandoned by the genius of MICHAEL ANGELO; they are preserved inviolate—"so sacred is the terror of Michael Angelo's genius!" exclaims Forsyth. These works are not always to be considered as failures of the chisel; they appear rather to have been rejected for coming short of the artist's first conceptions: yet, in a strain of sublime poetry, he has preserved his sentiments on the force of intellectual labour; he thought that there was nothing which the imagination conceived, that could not be made visible in marble, if the hand was made to obey the mind:—

Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto,
Che un marmo solo in se non circoscriva
Col suo soverchio, e solo a quello arriva
La mano che obbedisce all' intelletto.

IMITATED.

The sculptor never yet conceived a thought
That yielding marble has refused to aid;
But never with a mastery he wrought—
Save when the hand the intellect obeyed.

An interesting domestic story has been preserved of GESNER, who so zealously devoted his graver and his pencil to the arts. His sensibility was ever struggling after that ideal excellence he could not attain; often he sunk into fits of melancholy, and gentle as he was, the tenderness of his wife and friends could not sooth his distempered feelings; it was necessary to abandon him to his own thoughts, till after a long abstinence from his neglected works, in a lucid moment, some accident occasioned him to return to them. In one of these hypochondria of genius, after a long interval of despair, one morning at breakfast with his wife, his eye fixed on one of

his pictures; it was a group of fauns with young shepherds dancing at the entrance of a cavern shaded with vines; his eye appeared at length to glisten; and a sudden return to good humour broke out in this lively apostrophe, "Ah! see those playful children, they always dance!" This was the moment of gaiety and inspiration, and he flew to his forsaken easel.

La Harpe, an author by profession, observes, that as it has been shown, that there are some maladies peculiar to artisans*,—there are also sorrows which are peculiar to them, and which the world can neither pity nor soften, because they do not enter into their experience. The querulous language of so many men of genius has been sometimes attributed to causes very different from the real ones,—the most fortunate live to see their talents contested and their best

* See Ramazini, "De Morbis Artificium Diatriba," which Dr. James translated in 1750. It is a sad reflection, resulting from this curious treatise, that the arts entail no small mischief upon their respective workmen; so that the means by which they live are too often the occasion of their being hurried out of the world.

works decried. Assuredly many an author has sunk into his grave without the consciousness of having obtained that fame for which he had sacrificed an arduous life. The too feeling SMOLLET has left this testimony to posterity. "Had some of those, who are pleased to call themselves my friends, been at any pains to deserve the character, and told me ingenuously what I had to expect in the capacity of an *author*, I should, in all probability, have spared myself the *incredible labour* and *chagrin* I have since undergone." And SMOLLET was a popular writer! POPE'S solemn declaration in the preface to his collected works comes by no means short of SMOLLET'S avowal. HUME'S philosophical indifference could often suppress that irritability which Pope and Smollet fully indulged. But were the feelings of HUME more obtuse, or did his temper, gentle as it was constitutionally, bear, with a saintly patience, the mortifications his literary life so long endured? After recomposing two of his works, which incurred the same neglect in their altered form, he raised the most sanguine hopes of his history,—

but he tells us, "miserable was my disappointment!" Although he never deigned to reply to his opponents, yet they haunted him; and an eye-witness has thus described the irritated author discovering in conversation his suppressed resentment—"His forcible mode of expression, the brilliant quick movements of his eyes, and the gestures of his body,"—these betrayed the pangs of contempt, or of aversion! HOGARTH, in a fit of the spleen, advertised that he had determined not to give the world any more original works, and intended to pass the rest of his days in painting portraits. The same advertisement is marked by farther irritability. He contemptuously offers the purchasers of his "Analysis of Beauty," to present them *gratis* with "an eighteen-penny pamphlet," published by Ramsay the painter, written in opposition to Hogarth's principles. So untameable was the irritability of this great inventor in art, that he attempts to conceal his irritation by offering to dispose gratuitously of the criticism which had disturbed his nights.

Parties confederate against a man of genius, as

happened to Corneille, to D'Avenant* and Milton, and a Pradon and a Settle carry away the meed of a Racine and a Dryden. It was to support the drooping spirit of his friend Racine on the opposition raised against Phædra, that Boileau addressed to him an epistle "on the utility to be drawn from the jealousy of the envious." The calm dignity of the historian De Thou, amidst the passions of his times, confidently expected that justice from posterity which his own age refused to his early and his late labour: that great man was, however, compelled, by his injured feelings, to compose a poem, under the name of another, to serve as his apology against the intolerant Court of Rome, and the factious politicians of France; it was a noble subterfuge to which a

* "See Quarrels of Authors," vol. ii. on the confederacy of several wits against D'Avenant, a great genius; where I discovered that a volume of poems, said "to be written by the author's friends," which had hitherto been referred to as a volume of panegyrics, contains nothing but irony and satire, which had escaped the discovery of so many transcribers of title-pages frequently miscalled literary historians.

great genius was forced. The acquaintances of the poet COLLINS probably complained of his wayward humours and irritability; but how could they sympathize with the secret mortification of the poet, who imagined that he had composed his Pastorals on wrong principles; or when in the agony of his soul, he consigned to the flames with his own hands his unsold, but immortal Odes? Nor must we forget the dignified complaint of the Rambler, with which he awfully closes his work, in appealing to posterity.

Genius contracts those peculiarities, of which it is so loudly accused, in its solitary occupations; that loftiness of spirit, those quick jealousies, those excessive affections and aversions, which view every thing, as it passes in its own ideal world, and rarely as it exists in the mediocrity of reality. If this irritability of genius be a malady which has raged even among philosophers, we must not be surprised at the poetical temperament. They have abandoned their country, they have changed their name, they have punished themselves with exile in the rage of their disorder.

DESCARTES sought in vain, even in his secreted life, for a refuge for his genius; he thought himself persecuted in France, he thought himself calumniated among strangers, and he went and died in Sweden; and little did that man of genius think, that his countrymen would beg to have his ashes restored to them. The reasoning HUME once proposed to change his name and his country, and I believe did. The great poetical genius of our times has openly alienated himself from the land of his brothers; he becomes immortal in the language of a people whom he would contemn*: Does he accept with ingratitude the

* I shall preserve a manuscript note of Lord BYRON on this passage; not without a hope that we shall never receive from him the genius of Italian poetry, otherwise than in the language of his "*father-land;*" an expressive term, which I adopted from the Dutch language some years past, and which I have seen since sanctioned by the pens of Lord Byron and of Mr. Southey.

His lordship has here observed, "It is not my fault that I am obliged to write in English. If I understood my present language equally well, I would write in it; but this will require ten years at least to form a style: no tongue so easy to acquire a little of, or so difficult to

fame he loves more than life? I foresee the columns which would be raised to his awful genius struck down by his own hands, and his name in our poetry to be a fixed and dark cloud hanging over posterity.

Such then is that state of irritability in which men of genius participate, considered as inventors —as men of learning—as fine writers—and as artists. It is a state not friendly to equality of temper; in those various humours incidental to it, when they are often deeply affected, the cause escapes all perception of sympathy; the intellectual malady eludes even the tenderness of friendship; at those moments, the lightest injury to the feelings which at another time would make no impression may produce a perturbed state of feeling in the warm temper, or the corroding chagrin of a self-wounded spirit. There are

master thoroughly as Italian." On the same page I find the following note: "What was rumoured of me in that language? If true, I was unfit for England: if false, England was unfit for me:—'There is a world elsewhere.' I have never regretted for a moment that country, but often that I ever returned to it at all."

moments which claim the encouragements of friendship, animated by a high esteem for the intellectual excellence of this man of genius—not the general intercourse of society,—not the insensibility of the dull, nor the levity of the volatile.

Men of genius are often reverenced only where they are known by their writings; intellectual beings in the romance of life—in its history, they are men! ERASMUS compared them to the great figures in tapestry-work, which lose their effect when not seen at a distance. Their foibles and their infirmities are obvious to their associates, often only capable of discerning these qualities. The defects of great men are the consolation of the dunces.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SPIRIT OF LITERATURE AND THE SPIRIT OF SOCIETY—THE INVENTORS—SOCIETY OFFERS SEDUCTION AND NOT REWARD TO MEN OF GENIUS—THE NOTIONS OF PERSONS OF FASHION OF MEN OF GENIUS—THE HABITUDES OF THE MAN OF GENIUS DISTINCT FROM THOSE OF THE MAN OF SOCIETY—STUDY, MEDITATION, AND ENTHUSIASM, IS THE PROGRESS OF GENIUS—THE DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN THE MEN OF THE WORLD AND THE LITERARY CHARACTER.

THE INVENTORS who inherited little or nothing from their predecessors, appear to have pursued their insulated studies in the full independence of their mind and the development of their inventive faculty; they stood apart, in seclusion, the solitary lights of their age. Such were the founders of our literature; Bacon and Hobbes, Newton and Milton. Even so late as the days of Dryden, Addison, and Pope, the man of genius drew his circle round his intimates; his day was

uniform, his habits unbroken, and he was never too far removed, nor too long estranged from meditation and reverie; his works were the sources of his pleasure, ere they became the labours of his pride.

But when a more uniform light of knowledge comes from all sides, the genius of society, made up of so many sorts of genius, becomes greater than the genius of the individual who has entirely yielded himself up to his solitary art; hence the character of a man of genius becomes subordinate. A conversation age succeeds a studious one, and the family of genius, the poet, the painter, and the student, are no longer recluses; they mix with their rivals, who are jealous of equality, or with others, who, incapable of valuing them for themselves alone, rate them but as parts of an integral.

The man of genius is now tramelled with the artificial and mechanical forms of life; and in too close an intercourse with society, the loneliness and raciness of thinking is modified away in its seductive conventions. An excessive indulgence in the pleasures of social life, constitutes the great

interests of a luxuriant and opulent age; but of late, while the arts of assembling in large societies have been practised, varied by all forms, and pushed on to all excesses, it may become a question whether our happiness is improved or our individual character formed, as in a society not so heterogeneous and unsocial, as that crowd, termed, with the sort of modesty peculiar to our times, "a small party:" the simplicity of parade, the humility of pride, and the egotism which multiplies itself in proportion to the numbers it assembles.

It may, too, be a question whether the literary man and the artist are not immolating their genius to society, when, in the shadowiness of assumed talents—that counterfeiting of all shapes, they lose their real form, with the mockery of Proteus. But nets of roses catch their feet, and a path where all the senses are flattered is now opened to win an Epictetus from his hut; and the art of multiplying the enjoyments of society is discovered in the morning lounge, the evening dinner, and the midnight coterie. In frivolous fatigues, and vigils without meditation, perish the unvalued hours

which, true genius knows, are always too brief for art, and too rare to catch its inspirations. Hence so many of our contemporaries, whose card-racks are crowded, have produced only flashy fragments; efforts, but not works; they seem to be effects without causes;—and as a great author, who is not one of them, once observed to me, "they waste a barrel of gunpowder in squibs."

And yet it is seduction, and not reward, which mere fashionable society offers the man of true genius; he will be sought for with enthusiasm, but he cannot escape from his certain fate—that of becoming tiresome to his pretended admirers.

At first the idol—shortly he is changed into a victim. He forms, indeed, a figure in their little pageant, and is invited as a sort of *improvisatore;* but the esteem they concede to him is only a part of the system of politeness; and should he be dull in discovering the favourite quality of their self-love, or of participating in their volatile tastes, he will find frequent opportunities of observing with the sage at the court of Cyprus, that "what he knows, is not proper for this place; and what is

proper for this place, he knows not." They take little personal interest in the literary character. HORACE WALPOLE lets us into this secret when writing to another man of fashion, on such a man of genius as GRAY: "I agree with you most absolutely in your opinion about GRAY; he is the worst company in the world. From a melancholy turn, from living reclusely, and from a little too much dignity, he never converses easily; all his words are measured and chosen and formed into sentences: his writings are admirable—he himself is not agreeable." This volatile being in himself personified the quintessence of that society which is called "the world," and could not endure that equality of intellect which genius exacted. He rejected Chatterton, and quarrelled with every literary man and every artist he invited to familiarity—and then hated: witness the fates of Bentley, of Muntz, of Gray, of Cole, and others. Such a mind was incapable of appreciating the literary glory on which the mighty mind of BURKE was meditating. He knew BURKE at this critical moment of life, and he has recorded his own

feelings. "There was a young Mr. BURKE who wrote a book in the style of Lord Bolingbroke, that was much admired. He is a sensible man, but has not *worn off his authorism yet*, and thinks there is nothing so charming as writers, and to be one:—*he will know better one of these days.*" GRAY and BURKE! What mighty men must be submitted to the petrifying sneer, and that indifference of selfism for great sympathies, of this volatile and heartless man of literature and rank!

"———— That thing of silk,
Sporus that mere white curd of ass's milk!"

The confidential confession of RACINE to his son is remarkable: "Do not think that I am sought after by the great for my dramas: Corneille composes nobler verses than mine, but no one notices him, and he only pleases by the mouth of the actors. I never allude to my works when with men of the world, but I amuse them about matters they like to hear. My talent with them consists, not in making them feel that I have any,

but in showing them that they have." RACINE treated the great like the children of society; CORNEILLE would not compromise for the tribute he exacted, but he consoled himself when at his entrance into the theatre the audience usually rose to salute him. The great comic genius of France, who indeed was a very thoughtful and serious man, addressed a poem to the painter MIGNARD, expressing his conviction that "the court," by which a Frenchman of the court of Louis XIV. meant the society we call "fashionable," is fatal to the perfection of art:

"Qui se donne à la cour se derobe à son art;
Un esprit partagé rarement se consomme,
Et les emplois de feu demandent tout l'homme."

Has not the fate of our reigning literary favourites been uniform? Their mayoralty hardly exceeds the year: they are pushed aside to put in their place another, who in his turn must descend. Such is the history of the literary character encountering the perpetual difficulty of appearing

what he really is not, while he sacrifices to a few, in a certain corner of the metropolis, who have long fantastically called themselves "the world," that more dignified celebrity which makes an author's name more familiar than his person. To one who appeared astonished at the extensive celebrity of BUFFON, the modern Pliny replied, "I have passed fifty years at my desk." HAYDN would not yield up to society more than those hours which were not devoted to study; these were indeed but few: and such were the uniformity and retiredness of his life, that "He was for a long time the only musical man in Europe who was ignorant of the celebrity of Joseph Hadyn." And has not one, the most sublime of the race, sung,

——— che seggendo in piuma
In Fama non si vien, ne sotto coltre;
Sanza la qual chi sua vita consuma
Cotal vestigio in terra di se lascia
Qual fummo in aere, ed in acqua la schiuma.

"For not on downy plumes, nor under shade
Of canopy reposing, Fame is won;

> Without which, whosoe'er consumes his days,
> Leaveth such vestige of himself on earth—
> As smoke in air, or foam upon the wave*."

But men of genius, in their intercourse with persons of fashion, have a secret inducement to court that circle; they feel a perpetual want of having the reality of their talents confirmed to themselves, and they often step into society to observe in what degree they are objects of attention; for, though ever accused of vanity, the greater part of men of genius feel that their existence, as such, must depend on the opinions of others. This standard is in truth always problematical and variable; yet they cannot hope to find a more certain one among their rivals, who at all times are adroitly depreciating their brothers, and "dusking" their lustre: they discover among those cultivators of literature and the arts who have recourse to them for their pleasure, impassioned admirers, rather than unmerciful judges; judges, who have only time to acquire that degree

* Cary's Dante, Canto XXIV.

of illumination which is just sufficient to set at ease the fears of these claimants of genius.

When literary men assemble together, what mimetic friendships, in their mutual corruption! Creatures of intrigue, they borrow other men's eyes, and act by feelings often even contrary to their own: they wear a mask on their face, and only sing a tune they have caught. Some Hierophant in their mysteries proclaims their elect whom they have to initiate, and their profane who are to stand apart under their ban. They bend to the spirit of the age, but they do not elevate the public to them; they care not for truth, but only study to produce effect, and they do nothing for fame but what obtains an instant purpose; yet their fame is not therefore the more real, for every thing connected with fashion becomes obsolete; her ear has a great susceptibility of weariness, and her eye rolls for incessant novelty, and never was she earnest for any thing; men's minds with her become tarnished and old-fashioned as furniture. But the steams of rich dinners, the eye which sparkles with the wines of France, the luxurious

night which flames with more heat and brilliancy than God has made the day, this is the world the man of coterie-celebrity has chosen; and the Epicurean, as long as his senses have not ceased to act, laughs at the few who retire to the solitary midnight lamp. Posthumous fame is—a nothing! such live like unbelievers in a future state, and their narrow calculating spirit coldly dies in their artificial world: but true genius looks at a nobler source of its existence; it catches inspiration in its insulated studies; and to the great genius, who feels how his present is necessarily connected with his future celebrity, posthumous fame is a reality, for the sense acts upon him.

The habitudes of genius, before it lost its freshness in this society, are the mould in which the character is cast; and these, in spite of all the disguise of the man, will make him a distinct being from the man of society. Those who have assumed the literary character, often for purposes very distinct from literary ones, imagine that their circle is the public; but in this factitious public

all their interests, their opinions, and even their passions, are temporary, and the admirers with the admired pass away with their season. "It is not sufficient that we speak the same language," says a witty philosopher, "but we must learn their dialect; we must think as they think, and we must echo their opinions, as we act by imitation." Let the man of genius then dread to level himself to that mediocrity of feeling and talent required in such circles of society, lest he become one of themselves; he will soon find that to think, will in time become to act. But he who in solitude adopts no transient feelings, and reflects no artificial lights, who is only himself, possesses an immense advantage: he has not attached importance to what is merely local and fugitive, but listens to interior truths, and fixes on the immutable nature of things. He is the man of every age. Malebranche has observed, that "It is not indeed thought to be charitable to disturb common opinions, because it is not truth which unites society as it exists, so much as opinion and custom:" a principle which the world would not, I think,

disagree with; but which tends to render folly wisdom itself, and make error immortal.

Ridicule indeed is the light scourge of society, and the terror of genius; ridicule surrounds him with her chimeras, which, like the shadowy monsters opposing Æneas, are impalpable to his strokes: but when the sibyl bade the hero proceed without noticing them, he found these airy nothings as harmless as they were unreal. The habits of the literary character will however be tried by the men and women of the world by their own standard; they have no other; the salt of ridicule gives a poignancy to their deficient comprehension and their perfect ignorance of the persons or things which are the subjects of their ingenious animadversions. The habits of the literary character seem inevitably repulsive to persons of the world. VOLTAIRE, and his companion, the scientific Madame DE CHATELET, she who introduced Newton to the French nation, lived entirely devoted to literary pursuits, and their habits were strictly so. It happened once that this learned pair dropped unexpectedly into a

fashionable circle in the *chateau* of a French nobleman. A Madame De Staël, the *persifleur* in office of Madame Du Deffand, has copiously narrated the whole affair. They arrived at midnight, like two famished spectres, and there was some trouble to put them to supper and bed. They are called apparitions, because they were never visible by day, only at ten at night; for the one is busied in describing great deeds, and the other in commenting Newton. Like other apparitions, they are uneasy companions: they will neither play nor walk; they will not dissipate their mornings with the charming circle about them, nor allow the charming circle to break into their studies. Voltaire and Madame De Chatelet would have suffered the same pain in being forced to an abstinence of their regular studies, as this circle of "agréables" would have at the loss of their meals and their airings. However, she declares they were cyphers "en societé," adding no value to the number, and to which their learned writings bear no reference.

But if this literary couple would not play, what

was worse, Voltaire poured out a vehement declamation against a fashionable species of gambling which appears to have made them all stare. But Madame de Chatelet is the more frequent victim of our *persifleur*. The learned lady would change her apartment—for it was too noisy, and it had smoke without fire,—which last was her emblem. "She is reviewing her *Principia;* an exercise she repeats every year, without which precaution they might escape from her, and get so far away that she might never find them again. I believe that her head in respect to them is a house of imprisonment rather than the place of their birth; so that she is right to watch them closely; and she prefers the fresh air of this occupation to our amusements, and persists in her invisibility till night-time. She has six or seven tables in her apartment, for she wants them of all sizes; immense ones to spread out her papers—solid ones to hold her instruments—lighter ones, &c. Yet with all this she could not escape from the accident which happened to Philip II., after passing the night in writing, when a bottle of ink

fell over the despatches; but the lady did not imitate the moderation of the prince; indeed she had not written on state affairs, and what was spoilt in her room was algebra, much more difficult to copy out." Such is the just representation of a great poet with a great mathematician, whose habits were discordant with the fashionable circle where they resided—by one of themselves *.

Study, meditation, and enthusiasm,—this is the progress of genius, and these cannot be the habits of him who lingers till he can only live among polished crowds; and if he bears about him the consciousness of genius, he will be still acting under their influences. And perhaps there never was one of this class of men who had not either first entirely formed himself in solitude, or amidst society will be often breaking out to seek for himself. WILKES, no longer touched by the fervours of literary and patriotic glory, suffered life to melt away as a domestic voluptuary, and then it was

* See this letter in "Vie privée de Voltaire et Madame De Chatelet," p. 283.

that he observed with some surprise of the great Earl of CHATHAM, that he sacrificed every pleasure of social life, even in youth, to his great pursuit of eloquence; that ardent character, who had studied Barrow's Sermons so often as to repeat them from memory, and who could even read twice from beginning to end Bailey's Dictionary; little facts which belong only to great minds! The earl himself acknowledged an artifice he practised in his intercourse with society, for he said, "when he was young, he always came late into company, and left it early." VITTORIO ALFIERI, and a brother-spirit in our own noble poet, were rarely seen amidst the brilliant circle in which they were born; the workings of their imagination were perpetually emancipating them, and one deep loneliness of feeling proudly insulated them among the unimpassioned triflers of their rank. They preserved unbroken the unity of their character, in constantly escaping from the processional *spectacle* of society*. It is no trivial

* In a note which Lord BYRON has written in a copy of this work, his lordship says, " I fear this was not the

observation of another noble writer, Lord SHAFTESBURY, that "it may happen that a person may be so much the worse author, for being the finer gentleman."

An extraordinary instance of this disagreement between the man of the world and the literary character, we find in a philosopher seated on a throne. The celebrated JULIAN stained the imperial purple with an author's ink; and when he resided among the Antiochians, his unalterable character shocked that volatile and luxurious race. He slighted the plaudits of their theatre, he abhorred their dances and their horse-races, he was abstinent even at a festival, and incorrupt himself, perpetually admonished the dissipated citizens of their impious abandonment of the laws

case; I have been but too much in that circle, especially in 1812-13-14."

To the expression of "one deep loneliness of feeling," his lordship has marked in the margin "True." I am gratified to confirm the theory of my ideas of the man of genius, by the practical experience of the greatest of our age.

of their country. They libelled the emperor, and petulantly lampooned his beard, which the philosopher carelessly wore, neither perfumed nor curled. JULIAN, scorning to inflict a sharper punishment, pointed at them his satire of "the Misopogon, or the Antiochian; the Enemy of the Beard," where amidst the irony and invective, the literary monarch bestows on himself many exquisite and characteristic touches. All that those persons of fashion alleged against the literary character, JULIAN unreservedly confesses—his undressed beard and his awkwardnesses, his obstinacy, his unsociable habits, his deficient tastes, &c., while he represents his good qualities as so many extravagancies. But, in this Cervantic pleasantry of self-reprehension, he has not failed to show this light and corrupt people that he could not possibly resemble them, from the unhappiness of too strict an education under a family tutor, who had never suffered him to swerve from the one right way, with the additional misfortune of having inspired him with such a reverence for

Plato and Socrates, Aristotle and Theophrastus, as to have made them his models. "Whatever manners," says the emperor, "I may have previously contracted, whether gentle or boorish, it is impossible for me now to alter or unlearn. Habit it said to be a second nature; to oppose it is irksome, but to counteract *the study of more than thirty years* is extremely difficult, especially when it has been imbibed with so much attention."

And what if men of genius, relinquishing their habits, could do this violence to their nature, should we not lose the original for a factitious genius, and spoil one race without improving the other? If nature, and habit that second nature, which prevails even over the first, have created two beings distinctly different, what mode of existence shall ever assimilate them? Antipathies and sympathies, those still occult causes, however concealed, will break forth at an unguarded moment. Clip the wings of an eagle that he may roost among domestic fowls,—at some unforeseen moment his pinions will overshadow and terrify

his tiny associates, for "the feathered king" will be still musing on the rock and the cloud.

The man of genius will be restive even in his trammelled paces; too impatient amidst the heartless courtesies of society, and little practised in the minuter attentions, he has rarely sacrificed to the unlaughing graces of Lord Chesterfield. Plato ingeniously compares SOCRATES to the gallipots of the Athenian apothecaries; the grotesque figures of owls and apes were painted on their exterior, but they contained within precious balsams. The man of genius amidst many a circle, may exclaim with THEMISTOCLES when asked to play on a flute, "I cannot fiddle, but I can make a little village a great city;" and with CORNEILLE, he may be allowed to smile at his own deficiencies, and even disdain to please in certain conventional manners, asserting that "wanting all these things, he was not the less Corneille."

But with the great thinkers and students, their character is still more obdurate. ADAM SMITH could never free himself from the embarrassed

manners of a recluse; he was often absent, and his grave and formal conversation made him seem distant and reserved, when in fact, no man had warmer feelings for his intimates. One who knew Sir ISAAC NEWTON tells us, that "he would sometimes be silent and thoughtful, and look all the while as if he were saying his prayers." A French princess desirous of seeing the great moralist NICOLLE, experienced an inconceivable disappointment when the moral instructor entering with the most perplexing bow imaginable, silently sunk into his chair; the interview promoted no conversation, and the retired student whose elevated spirit might have endured martyrdom, shrunk with timidity in the unaccustomed honour of conversing with a princess and having nothing to say. Observe HUME thrown into a most ridiculous attitude by a woman of talents and coterie celebrity. Our philosopher was called on to perform his part in one of those inventions of the hour to which the fashionable, like children in society, have sometimes resorted to attract their world by the rumour of some new extrava-

gance. In the present, poor HUME was to represent a sultan on a sofa, sitting between two slaves, who were the prettiest and most vivacious of Parisians. Much was anticipated from this literary exhibition. The two slaves were ready at repartee, but the utter simplicity of the sultan, displayed a blockishness which blunted all edge. The phlegmatic metaphysician and historian, only gave a sign of life by repeating the same awkward gesture, and the same ridiculous exclamation, without end. One of the fair slaves soon discovered the unchangable nature of the forlorn philosopher, impatiently exclaiming, "I guessed as much, never was there such a calf of a man!"—"Since this affair," adds Madame d'Epinay, "Hume is at present banished to the class of spectators." The philosopher, indeed, had formed a more correct conception of his own character than the volatile sylphs of the Parisian circle, for in writing to the Countess de Boufflers, on an invitation to Paris, he said, "I have rusted amid on books and study; have been little engaged in the active and not much in the pleasurable scenes of

life; and am more accustomed to a select society than to general companies." If HUME made a ridiculous figure in these circles, the error did not lie on the side of that cheerful and profound philosopher.—This subject leads our inquiries to the nature of *the conversations of men of genius.*

CHAPTER IX.

CONVERSATIONS OF MEN OF GENIUS—THEIR DEFICIENT AGREEABLENESS MAY RESULT FROM QUALITIES WHICH CONDUCE TO THEIR GREATNESS—SLOW-MINDED MEN NOT THE DULLEST—THE CONVERSATIONISTS NOT THE ABLEST WRITERS—THEIR TRUE EXCELLENCE IN CONVERSATION CONSISTS OF ASSOCIATIONS WITH THEIR PURSUITS.

In conversation the sublime Dante was taciturn or satirical; Butler was sullen or caustic; Gray and Alfieri seldom talked or smiled; Descartes, whose habits had formed him for solitude and meditation, was silent; Rousseau was remarkably trite in conversation, not an idea, not a word of fancy or eloquence warmed him; Addison and Moliere were only observers in society; and Dryden has very honestly told us, "My conversation is slow and dull, my humour saturnine and reserved; in short, I am none of those who endeavour to break jests in company, or make repartees." Pope had lived among "the great," not only in rank but in intellect, the most de-

lightful conversationists; but he felt that he could not contribute to these seductive pleasures, and at last confessed that he could amuse and instruct himself much more by another means: "As much company as I have kept, and as much as I love it, I love reading better, and would rather be employed in reading, than in the most agreeable conversation." POPE'S conversation, as preserved by Spence, was sensible; and it would seem that he had never said but one witty thing in his whole life, for only one has been recorded. It was ingeniously said of VAUCANSON, that he was as much an automaton as any which he made. HOGARTH and SWIFT, who looked on the circles of society with eyes of inspiration, were absent in company; but their grossness and asperity did not prevent the one from being the greatest of comic painters, nor the other as much a creator of manners in his way. Genius, even in society, is pursuing its own operations, and it would cease to be itself, in becoming another.

Men of genius who are habitually eloquent, or who have practised conversation as an art, for

some even sacrifice their higher pursuits to this perishable exertion, have indeed excelled, and in the most opposite manner. HORNE TOOKE finely discriminates the wit in conversation of Sheridan and Curran, after having passed an evening in their company. "SHERIDAN'S wit was like steel highly polished and sharpened for display and use; CURRAN'S was a mine of virgin gold, incessantly crumbling away from its own richness." My learned friend Mr. Charles Butler, whose reminiscences of his illustrious contemporaries are derived from personal intercourse, has correctly described the familiar conversations of PITT, FOX, and BURKE. "The most intimate friends of Mr. FOX complained of his too frequent ruminating silence. Mr. PITT talked, and his talk was fascinating. Mr. BURKE'S conversation was rambling, but splendid and instructive beyond comparison." Let me add, that the finest genius of our times, is the most delightful man; he is that rarest among the rare of human beings, whom to have known—is nearly to adore; whom to have seen, to have heard, forms an era in our life;

whom youth remembers with enthusiasm, and whose presence the men and women of "the world" feel like a dream from which they would not awaken. His *bonhommie* attaches our hearts to him by its simplicity; his legendary conversation makes us, for a moment, poets like himself.

But that deficient agreeableness in social life with which men of genius have been often reproached, may really result from the nature of those qualities which conduce to the greatness of their public character. A thinker whose mind is saturated with knowledge on a particular subject, will be apt to deliver himself authoritatively; but he will then pass for a dogmatist: should he hesitate, that he may correct an equivocal expression, or bring nearer a remote idea, he is in danger of sinking into pedantry or rising into genius. Even the fulness of knowledge has its tediousness. "It is rare," says MALEBRANCHE, "that those who meditate profoundly, can explain well the objects they have meditated on; for they hesitate when they have to speak: they are scrupulous to convey false ideas or use inaccurate terms. They do not

choose to speak, like others, merely for the sake of talking." A vivid and sudden perception of truth, or a severe scrutiny after it, may elevate the voice, and burst with an irruptive heat on the subdued tone of conversation. These men are too much in earnest for the weak or the vain; such seriousness kills their feeble animal spirits. SMEATON, a creative genius of his class, had a warmth of expression which seemed repulsive to many: it arose from an intense application of mind, which impelled him to break out hastily when any thing was said that did not accord with his ideas. Persons who are obstinate till they can give up their notions with a safe conscience, are troublesome intimates: often too is the cold tardiness of decision only the strict balancings of scepticism or candour, while obscurity as frequently may arise from the deficiency of previous knowledge in the listener. It was said that NEWTON in conversation did not seem to understand his own writings, and it was supposed that his memory had decayed. The fact, however, was not so; and Pemberton makes a curious di-

stinction, which accounts for NEWTON *not always being ready to speak* on subjects of which he was the sole master. "Inventors seem to treasure up in their own minds what they have found out, after another manner than those do the same things that have not this inventive faculty. The former, when they have occasion to produce their knowledge, in some means are obliged immediately to investigate part of what they want. For this they are not equally fit at all times; and thus it has often happened, that such as retain things chiefly by means of a very strong memory, have appeared off-hand more expert than the discoverers themselves."

A peculiar characteristic in the conversations of men of genius, which has often injured them when the listeners were not intimately acquainted with the men, are those sports of a vacant mind, those sudden impulses to throw out paradoxical opinions, and to take unexpected views of things in some humour of the moment. These fanciful and capricious ideas are the grotesque images of a playful mind, and are at least as frequently mis-

represented as they are misunderstood. But thus the cunning Philistines are enabled to triumph over the strong and gifted man, because in the hour of confidence, and in the abandonment of the mind, he had laid his head in the lap of wantonness, and taught them how he might be shorn of his strength. Dr. JOHNSON appears often to have indulged this amusement, both in good and in ill-humour. Even such a calm philosopher as ADAM SMITH, as well as such a child of imagination as BURNS, were remarked for this ordinary habit of men of genius; which perhaps as often originates in a gentle feeling of contempt for their auditors, as from any other cause. Many years after having written the above, I discovered two recent confessions which confirm the principle. A literary character, the late Dr. LEYDEN, acknowledged, that "In conversation I often verge so nearly on absurdity, that I know it is perfectly easy to misconceive me, as well as to misrepresent me." And Miss Edgeworth, in describing her father's conversation, observes, that "His openness went too far, almost to imprudence;

exposing him not only to be misrepresented, but to be misunderstood. Those who did not know him intimately, often took literally, what was either said in sport, or spoken with the intention of making a strong impression for some good purpose." CUMBERLAND, whose conversation was delightful, happily describes the species I have noticed. "Nonsense talked by men of wit and understanding in the hour of relaxation, is of the very finest essence of conviviality, and a treat delicious to those who have the sense to comprehend it; but it implies a trust in the company not always to be risked." The truth is, that many, eminent for their genius, have been remarked in society for a simplicity and playfulness almost infantine. Such was the gaiety of HUME, and the *bonhommie* of FOX; and one who had long lived in a circle of men of genius in the last age, was disposed to consider this infantine simplicity as characteristic of genius: it is a solitary grace, which can never lend its charm to a man of the world, whose purity of mind has long been lost in

a hacknied intercourse with every thing exterior to himself.

But above all, what offends, is that freedom of opinion which a man of genius can no more divest himself of than of the features of his face. But what if this intractable obstinacy be only resistance of character? BURNS never could account to himself why, "though, when he had a mind he was pretty generally beloved, he could never get the art of commanding respect," and imagined it was owing to his deficiency in what Sterne calls "that understrapping virtue of discretion;" "I am so apt to a *lapsus linguæ*," says this honest sinner. Amidst the stupidity of a formal circle, and the inanity of triflers, however such men may conceal their impatience, one of them has forcibly described the reaction of this suppressed feeling: "The force with which it burst out when the pressure was taken off, gave the measure of the constraint which had been endured." ERASMUS, that learned and charming writer, who was blest with the genius which could enliven a folio, has

well described himself, *sum naturâ propensior ad jocos quam fortasse deceat*:—more constitutionally inclined to pleasantry than, as he is pleased to add, perhaps became him. We know in his intimacy with Sir Thomas More, that Erasmus was a most exhilarating companion; yet in his intercourse with the great he was not fortunate: at the first glance he saw through affectation and parade, and his freedom carried with it no pleasantry for those who knew not to prize a laughing sage.

In conversation the operations of the intellect with some are habitually slow, but there will be found no difference in the result of their perceptions, with others of a quicker nature; and hence it is, that slow-minded men are not, as men of the world imagine, always the dullest. Nicolle said of a scintillant wit, "He vanquishes me in the drawing-room, but surrenders to me at discretion on the stairs." Many a great wit has thought the wit it was too late to speak, and many a great reasoner has only reasoned when his opponent has disappeared. Conversation with such men is a losing game; and it is often lamentable

to observe, how men of genius are reduced to a state of helplessness from not commanding their attention, while inferior intellects habitually are found to possess what is called "a ready mind." For this reason some, as it were in despair, have shut themselves up in silence. A lively Frenchman, in describing the distinct sorts of conversation of his literary friends, among whom was Dr. FRANKLIN, energetically hits off that close observer and thinker, wary, even in society; by noting down "the silence of the celebrated FRANKLIN." We learn from Cumberland, that Lord Mansfield did not promote that conversation which gave him any pains to carry on. He resorted to society for simple relaxation, and could even find a pleasure in dulness when accompanied with placidity. "It was a kind of cushion to his understanding," observes the wit. CHAUCER, like LA FONTAINE, was more facetious in his tales than in his conversation; for the Countess of Pembroke used to rally him, observing that his silence was more agreeable to her than his talk. TASSO's conversation, which his friend Manso has at-

tempted to preserve for us, was not agreeable. In company he sate absorbed in thought, with a melancholy air; and it was on one of these occasions that a person present, observing that this conduct denoted that of a mad man, TASSO, who had heard him, looking on him without emotion, asked whether he was ever acquainted with a madman who knew to hold his tongue? Malebranche tells us that one of these mere men of learning, who can only venture to praise antiquity, once said, "I have seen DESCARTES; I knew him, and frequently have conversed with him: he was a good sort of man, and was not wanting in sense, but he had nothing extraordinary in him." Had Aristotle spoken French instead of Greek, and had this man frequently conversed with him, unquestionably he would not have discovered, even in this idol of antiquity, any thing extraordinary; two thousand years would have been wanting for our learned critic's perceptions.

It is remarkable that the Conversationists have rarely proved to be the abler writers. He whose fancy is susceptible of excitement in the presence

of his auditors, making the minds of men run with his own, seizing on the first impressions, and touching the shadows and outlines of things—with a memory where all lies ready at hand, quickened by habitual associations, and varying with all those extemporary changes and fugitive colours which melt away in the rainbow of conversation; with that wit, which is only wit in one place, and for a time; with that vivacity of animal spirits, which often exists separately from the more retired intellectual powers—such can strike out wit by habit, and pour forth a stream of phrase which has sometimes been imagined to require only to be written down, to be read with the same delight with which it was heard: but they cannot print their tone, nor their air and manner, nor the contagion of their hardy sufficiency. All the while we had not been sensible of the flutter of their ideas, the incoherence of their transitions, their vague notions, their doubtful assertions, and their meagre knowledge—a pen is the extinguisher of these luminaries. A curious contrast occurred between BUFFON and his friend MONTBELLIARD,

who was associated in his great work; the one possessed the reverse qualities of the other: BUFFON, whose style in his composition is elaborate and declamatory, was in conversation coarse and careless. Pleading that conversation with him was only a relaxation, he rather sought than avoided the idiom and the slang of the mob, when these seemed expressive and facetious; while MONTBELLIARD threw every charm of animation over his delightful talk: but when he took his seat at the rival desk of Buffon, an immense interval separated them; he whose tongue dropped the honey and the music of the bee, handled a pen of iron; while Buffon's was the soft pencil of the philosophical painter of nature. Cowley and Killegrew furnish another instance. COWLEY was embarrassed in conversation, and had no quickness in argument or reply: a mind pensive and elegant could not be struck at to catch fire; while with KILLEGREW the sparkling bubbles of his fancy rose and dropped; when the delightful conversationist wrote, the deception ceased. Den-

ham, who knew them both, hit off the difference between them:

> "Had Cowley ne'er spoke, Killegrew ne'er writ,
> Combin'd in one they had made a matchless wit."

Not however that a man of genius does not throw out many things in conversation which have only been found admirable when the public possessed them. The public often widely differ from the individual, and a century's opinion may intervene between them. The fate of genius is sometimes that of the Athenian sculptor, who submitted his colossal Minerva to a private party for inspection; before the artist they trembled for his daring chisel, and the man of genius smiled; behind him they calumniated, and the man of genius forgave. Once fixed in a public place, in the eyes of the whole city, the statue was the Divinity! There is a certain distance at which opinions, as well as statues, must be viewed.

But enough of those defects of men of genius which often attend their conversations. Must we

then bow to authorial dignity, and kiss hands, because they are inked; and to the artist, who considers us as nothing unless we are canvass or marble under his hands? Are there not men of genius, the grace of society, and the charm of their circle? Fortunate men! more blest than their brothers; but for this, they are not the more men of genius, nor the others less. To how many of the ordinary intimates of a superior genius, who complain of his defects, might one say, "Do his productions not delight and sometimes surprise you?—You are silent! I beg your pardon; the *public* has informed you of a great name; you would not otherwise have perceived the precious talent of your neighbour: you know little of your friend but his *name*." The personal familiarity of ordinary minds with a man of genius has often produced a ludicrous prejudice. A Scotchman, to whom the name of *a* Dr. Robertson had travelled down, was curious to know who he was. "Your neighbour!" But he could not persuade himself that the man whom he conversed with was the great historian of his country. Even a good man

could not believe in the announcement of the Messiah, from the same sort of prejudice; "Can there any thing good come out of Nazareth?" said Nathaniel.

Suffer a man of genius to be such as nature and habit have formed him, and he will then be the most interesting companion; then will you see nothing but his character when it opens itself on you. AKENSIDE in conversation with select friends, often touched by a romantic enthusiasm, would pass in review those eminent ancients whom he loved; he imbued with his poetic faculty even the details of their lives; and seemed another Plato while he poured libations to their memory in the language of Plato, among those whose studies and feelings were congenial with his own. ROMNEY would give vent to his effusions with a fancy entirely his own, uttered in a hurried accent and elevated tone, and often accompanied by tears, to which by constitution he was prone; thus Cumberland describes the conversation of this man of genius, from personal intimacy. Even the temperate sensibility of HUME was touched by the

bursts of feeling of ROUSSEAU; who, he says, "in conversation kindles often to a degree of heat which looks like inspiration." BARRY was the most repulsive of men in his exterior; the vehemence of his language, the wildness of his glance, intermingling vulgar oaths, which, by some unlucky association of habit, served him as expletives and interjections, communicated even a horror to some: a pious lady, who had felt intolerable uneasiness in his presence, did not however leave this man of genius that evening without an impression that she had never heard so divine a man in her life. The conversation happening to turn on that principle of benevolence which pervades Christianity and the meekness of the Founder, it gave BARRY an opportunity of opening on the character of Jesus, with that copiousness of heart and mind, which once heard could never be forgotten. That artist indeed had long in his meditations an ideal head of Christ, which he was always talking of executing: "It is here!" he would cry, striking his head. That which baffled the invention, as we are told of Leonardo da Vinci, who

left his Christ headless, having exhausted his creative faculty among the apostles, this imaginative picture of the mysterious union of a divine and human nature, never ceased to haunt the reveries of BARRY in his conversations.

Few authors and artists but are eloquently instructive on that class of knowledge, or that department of art, which reveals the mastery of their life; their conversations of this nature, affect the mind to a distant period of life. Who, having listened to such, has forgotten what a man of genius has said at such moments? Who dwells not on the single thought, or the glowing expression, stamped in the heat of the moment, which came from its source? Then the mind of genius rises as the melody of the Æolian harp, when the winds suddenly sweep over the strings—it comes and goes—and leaves a sweetness beyond the harmonies of art.

The *Miscellanea* of POLITIAN are not only the result of his studies in the rich library of Lorenzo de Medici, but of conversations, which had passed in those rides which Lorenzo accom-

panied by Politian preferred to the pomp of cavalcades. When the Cardinal de Cabassolle strayed with PETRACH about his valley in many a wandering discourse, they sometimes extended their walks to such a distance, that the servant sought them in vain to announce the dinner-hour, and found them returning in the evening. When HELVETIUS enjoyed the social conversation of a literary friend, he described it as "a chase of ideas." Such are the literary conversations which HORNE TOOKE alluded to, when he said "I assure you, we find more difficulty to finish than to begin our conversations."

The conversations then of men of letters and of artists, natural and congenial to them, must be those which are associated with their pursuits, and these are of a different complexion with those of men of the world, whose objects are drawn from the temporary passions of party-men, or the variable *on dits* of triflers—topics studiously rejected from these more tranquillising conversations. Diamonds can only be polished by their own dust, and are only shaped by the friction of other

diamonds; and so it happens with literary men and artists.

A meeting of this nature has been recorded by CICERO, which himself and ATTICUS had with VARRO in the country. Varro arriving from Rome in their neighbourhood somewhat fatigued, had sent a messenger to his friends: "as soon as we had heard these tidings," says Cicero, "we could not delay hastening to see one, who was attached to us by the same pursuits and by former friendship." They set off, but found Varro halfway, urged by the same eager desire to join them. They conducted him to Cicero's villa. Here while Cicero was inquiring after the news of Rome, Atticus interrupted the political rival of Cæsar, observing, "Let us leave off inquiring after things which cannot be heard without pain. Rather ask about what we know, for Varro's muses are longer silent than they used to be, yet surely he has not forsaken them, but rather conceals what he writes."—"By no means!" replied Varro, "for I deem him to be a whimsical man to write what he wishes to suppress. I have in-

deed a great work in hand (on the Latin language), long designed for Cicero." The conversation then took its natural turn by Atticus having got rid of the political anxiety of Cicero. Such, too, were the conversations which passed at the literary residence of the Medici family; which was described, with as much truth as fancy, as "the Lyceum of philosophy, the Arcadia of poets, and the academy of painters." We have a pleasing instance of such a meeting of literary friends in those conversations which passed in POPE's garden, where there was often a remarkable union of nobility and literary men; there Thomson, Mallet, Gay, Hooke, and Glover, met Cobham, Bathurst, Chesterfield, Lyttelton, and other lords; there some of these poets found patrons, and POPE himself discovered critics. The contracted views of Spence have unfortunately not preserved these literary conversations, but a curious passage has dropped from the pen of Lord BOLINGBROKE, in what his lordship calls "a letter to Pope," often probably passed over among his political tracts. It breathes the spirit of those delightful conversations. "My

thoughts," writes his lordship, "in what order soever they flow, shall be communicated to you just *as they pass through my mind*; just as they used to be when *we conversed together* on these or any other subject; when *we sauntered alone*, or as we have often done with good Arbuthnot, and the jocose Dean of St. Patrick, among *the multiplied scenes of your little garden*. That theatre is large enough for my ambition." Such a scene opens a beautiful subject for a curious portrait-painter. These literary groups in the gardens of Pope sauntering, or divided in confidential intercourse, would furnish a scene of literary repose and enjoyment, among some of the most illustrious names in our literature.

CHAPTER X.

LITERARY SOLITUDE—ITS NECESSITY—ITS PLEASURES—OF VISITORS BY PROFESSION—ITS INCONVENIENCIES.

THE literary character is reproached with an extreme passion for retirement, cultivating those insulating habits which are great interruptions, and even weakeners of domestic happiness, while in public life these often induce to a secession from its cares, thus eluding its active duties. Yet the vacancies of such retired men are eagerly filled by so many unemployed men of the world more happily framed for its business. We do not hear these accusations raised against the painter who wears away his days at his easel, or the musician by the side of his instrument; and much less should we against the legal and the commercial character; yet all these are as much withdrawn from public and private life as the literary cha-

racter; their desk is as insulating as the library. Yet the man who is working for his individual interest, is more highly estimated than the retired student, whose disinterested pursuits are at least more profitable to the world than to himself. La Bruyère discovered the world's erroneous estimate of literary labour: "There requires a better name," he says, "to be bestowed on the leisure (the idleness he calls it) of the literary character, —to meditate, to compose, to read and to be tranquil, should be called *working*." But so invisible is the progress of intellectual pursuits, and so rarely are the objects palpable to the observers, that the literary character appears to be denied for his pursuits, what cannot be refused to every other. That unremitting application and unbroken series of their thoughts, admired in every profession, is only complained of in that one whose professors with so much sincerity mourn over the brevity of life, which has often closed on them while sketching their works.

It is, however, only in solitude that the genius of eminent men has been formed; there their first

thoughts sprang, and there it will become them to find their last: for the solitude of old age—and old age must be often in solitude—may be found the happiest with the literary character. Solitude is the nurse of enthusiasm, and enthusiasm is the true parent of genius; in all ages it has been called for—it has been flown to. No considerable work was ever composed, till its author, like an ancient magician, first retired to the grove, or to the closet, to invocate. When genius languishes in an irksome solitude among crowds, that is the moment to fly into seclusion and meditation. There is a society in the deepest solitude; in all the men of genius of the past—

"First of your kind, Society divine!"

and in Themselves; for there only they can indulge in the romances of their soul, and only in solitude can they occupy themselves in their dreams and their vigils, and, with the morning, fly without interruption to the labour they had reluctantly quitted. If at times a large portion of their days do not melt harmoniously into each

other, and that they do not pass whole weeks together without intervening absences in their study, they will not be admitted into the last recess of the Muses; whether their glory comes from researches, or from enthusiasm, Time, with not a feather ruffled on his wings, Time alone opens discoveries and kindles meditation. This desert of solitude, so vast and so dreary to the man of the world, to the man of genius is the magical garden of Armida, whose enchantments arose amidst solitude, while solitude was every where among those enchantments.

Whenever MICHAEL ANGELO, that "divine madman," as Richardson once wrote on the back of one of his drawings, was meditating on some great design, he closed himself up from the world. "Why do you lead so solitary a life?" asked a friend. "Art," replied the sublime artist, "Art is a jealous god; it requires the whole and entire man." During his mighty labour in the Sistine Chapel, he refused to have any communication with any person even at his own house; such undisturbed and solitary attention even undoubted

genius demands, to perform its tasks; how then shall we deem of that feebler race who exult in occasional excellence, and who so often deceive themselves by mistaking the evanescent flashes of genius for that holier flame which burns on its altar, because the fuel is incessantly supplied?

We observe men of genius, in public situations, sighing for this solitude; amidst the impediments of the world, and their situation in it, they are doomed to view their intellectual banquet often rising before them, like some fairy delusion, never to taste it. They feel that finer existence in solitude. The great VERULAM often complained of the disturbances of his public life, and rejoiced in the occasional solitude he stole from public affairs. "And now because I am in the country, I will send you some of my country fruits, which with me are good meditations; when I am in the city, they are choked with business." Lord CLARENDON, whose life so happily combined the contemplative with the active powers of man, dwells on three periods of retirement which he enjoyed; he always took pleasure in relating the

great tranquillity of spirit experienced during his solitude at Jersey, where for more than two years, employed on his History, he daily wrote "one sheet of large paper with his own hand." At the close of his life, his literary labours in his other retirements are detailed with a proud satisfaction. Each of his solitudes occasioned a new acquisition; to one he owed the Spanish, to another the French, and to a third the Italian literature. The public are not yet acquainted with the fertility of Lord Clarendon's literary labours. It was not vanity that induced Scipio to declare of solitude, that it had no loneliness for him, since he voluntarily retired amidst a glorious life to his Linternum. CICERO was uneasy amidst applauding Rome, and has distinguished his numerous works by the titles of his various villas. AULUS GELLIUS marked his solitude by his "Attic Nights." The "Golden Grove" of JEREMY TAYLOR is the produce of his retreat at the Earl of Carberry's seat in Wales; and the "Diversions of Purley" preserved a man of genius for posterity. VOLTAIRE had talents, well adapted for society; but at one

period of his life he passed five years in the most secret seclusion, and indeed usually lived in retirement. MONTESQUIEU quitted the brilliant circles of Paris for his books and his meditations, and was ridiculed by the gay triflers he deserted; "but my great work," he observes in triumph, "avance à pas de geant." HARRINGTON, to compose his Oceana, severed himself from the society of his friends. DESCARTES, inflamed by genius, hires an obscure house in an unfrequented quarter at Paris, and there he passes two years, unknown to his acquaintance. ADAM SMITH, after the publication of his first work, withdrew into a retirement that lasted ten years: even Hume rallies him for separating himself from the world; but by this means the great political inquirer satisfied the world by his great work. And thus it was with men of genius, long ere PETRARCH withdrew to his Val chiusa.

The interruption of visitors by profession has been feelingly lamented by men of letters. The mind, maturing its speculations, feels the unex-

pected conversation of cold ceremony, chilling as March winds over the blossoms of the Spring. Those unhappy beings who wander from house to house, privileged by the charter of society to obstruct the knowledge they cannot impart, to weary because they are wearied, or to seek amusement at the cost of others, belong to that class of society which have affixed no other value to time than that of getting rid of it; these are judges not the best qualified to comprehend the nature and evil of their depredations in the silent apartment of the studious. When MONTESQUIEU was deeply engaged in his great work, he writes to a friend, "The favour which your friend Mr. Hein often does me to pass his mornings with me, occasions great damage to my work as well by his impure French, as the length of his details."— "We are afraid," said some of those visitors to BAXTER, "that we break in upon your time."— "To be sure you do," replied the disturbed and blunt scholar. To hint as gently as he could to his friends that he was avaricious of time, one of

the learned Italians had a prominent inscription over the door of his study, intimating that whoever remained there must join in his labours. The amiable MELANCTHON, incapable of a harsh expression, when he received these idle visits, only noted down the time he had expended, that he might reanimate his industry, and not lose a day. EVELYN continually importuned by morning visitors, or "taken up by other impertinencies of my life in the country," stole his hours from his night-rest "to redeem his losses." The literary character has been driven to the most inventive shifts to escape the irruption of a formidable party at a single rush, who enter, without "besieging or beseeching," as Milton has it. The late elegant poetical Mr. Ellis, on one of these occasions at his country-house, assured a literary friend, that when driven to the last, he usually made his escape by a leap out of the window; and Boileau has noticed a similar dilemma when at the villa of the President Lamoignon, while they were holding their delightful conversations in his grounds.

" Quelquefois de Facheux arrivent trois volées,
Qui du parc à l'instant assiegent les allées;
Alors sauve qui peut, et quatrefois heureux
Qui sait s'échapper, à quelque antre ignoré d'eux."

Brand HOLLIS endeavoured to hold out "the idea of singularity as a shield;" and the great Robert BOYLE was compelled to advertise in a newspaper that he must decline visits on certain days, that he might have leisure to finish some of his works*.

BOCCACCIO has given an interesting account of the mode of life of the studious PETRARCH, for on a visit he found that PETRARCH would not suffer his hours of study to be broken into even by the person whom of all men he loved most, and did not quit his morning studies for his guest, who during that time occupied himself by reading or transcribing the works of his master. At the decline of the day Petrarch quitted his study for his garden, where

* This curious advertisement is preserved in Dr. Birch's Life of Boyle, p. 272.

he delighted to open his heart in mutual confidence.

But this solitude, at first a necessity, and then a pleasure, at length is not borne without repining. To tame the fervid wildness of youth to the strict regularities of study, is a sacrifice performed by the votary; but even MILTON appears to have felt this irksome period of life; for in the preface to Smectymnuus he says, "It is but justice not to defraud of due esteem the *wearisome labours* and *studious watchings* wherein I have spent and *tired out* almost a whole youth." COWLEY, that enthusiast for seclusion, in his retirement calls himself "the melancholy Cowley." I have seen an original letter of this poet to Evelyn, where he expresses his eagerness to see Sir George Mackenzie's Essay on Solitude; for a copy of which he had sent over the town, without obtaining one, being "either all bought up, or burnt in the fire of London."—"I am the more desirous," he says, "because it is a subject in which I am most deeply interested." Thus COWLEY was requiring a book to confirm his

predilection, and we know he made the experiment, which did not prove a happy one. We find even GIBBON, with all his fame about him, anticipating the dread he entertained of solitude in advanced life. "I feel, and shall continue to feel, that domestic solitude, however it may be alleviated by the world, by study, and even by friendship, is a comfortless state, which will grow more painful as I descend in the vale of years." And again—"Your visit has only served to remind me that man, however amused or occupied in his closet, was not made to live alone."

Had the mistaken notions of Sprat not deprived us of COWLEY's correspondence, we doubtless had viewed the picture of lonely genius touched by a tender pencil. But we have SHENSTONE, and GRAY, and SWIFT. The heart of SHENSTONE bleeds in the dead oblivion of solitude: "Now I am come from a visit, every little uneasiness is sufficient to introduce my whole train of melancholy considerations, and to make me utterly dissatisfied with the life I now lead, and the life I foresee I shall lead. I am angry, and envious, and dejected,

and frantic, and disregard all present things, as becomes a madman to do. I am infinitely pleased, though it is a gloomy joy, with the application of Dr. Swift's complaint, that he is forced to die in a rage, like a rat in a poisoned hole." Let the lover of solitude muse on its picture throughout the year, in this stanza by the same amiable but suffering poet:

Tedious again to curse the drizzling day,
Again to trace the wintry tracks of snow,
Or, soothed by vernal airs, again survey
The self-same hawthorns bud, and cowlips blow.

SWIFT's letters paint with terrifying colours a picture of solitude; and at length his despair closed with idiotism. Even the playful muse of GRESSET throws a sombre querulousness over the solitude of men of genius;

—— Je les vois, victimes du génie,
Au foible prix d'un éclat passager,
Vivre isolés, sans jouir de la vie!
Vingt ans d'ennuis pour quelques jours de gloire.

Such are the necessity, the pleasures, and the inconveniencies of solitude! It ceases to be a

question, whether men of genius should blend with the masses of society; for whether in solitude, or in the world, of all others they must learn to live with themselves: it is in the world that they borrow the sparks of thought that fly upwards and perish; but the flame of genius can only be lighted in their own solitary breast.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MEDITATIONS OF GENIUS—A WORK ON THE ART OF MEDITATION NOT YET PRODUCED—PREDISPOSING THE MIND—IMAGINATION AWAKENS IMAGINATION—GENERATING FEELINGS BY MUSIC—SLIGHT HABITS—DARKNESS AND SILENCE, IN SUSPENDING THE EXERCISE OF OUR SENSES, INCREASE THE VIVACITY OF OUR CONCEPTIONS—THE ARTS OF MEMORY—MEMORY THE FOUNDATION OF GENIUS—INVENTIONS BY SEVERAL TO PRESERVE THEIR OWN MORAL AND LITERARY CHARACTER—AND TO ASSIST THEIR STUDIES—THE MEDITATIONS OF GENIUS DEPEND ON HABIT—OF THE NIGHT-TIME—A DAY OF MEDITATION SHOULD PRECEDE A DAY OF COMPOSITION—WORKS OF MAGNITUDE FROM SLIGHT CONCEPTIONS—OF THOUGHTS NEVER WRITTEN—THE ART OF MEDITATION EXERCISED AT ALL HOURS AND PLACES—CONTINUITY OF ATTENTION THE SOURCE OF PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOVERIES—STILLNESS OF MEDITATION IS THE FIRST STATE OF EXISTENCE IN GENIUS.

A CONTINUITY of attention, a patient quietness of mind, forms one of the characteristics of genius.

To think, and to feel, constitute the two grand divisions of men of genius—reasoning and imagination: there is a thread in our thoughts, as there is a pulse in our hearts; he who can hold the one, knows to think, and he who can move the other, knows to feel.

A work on the art of meditation has not yet been produced; yet such might prove of immense advantage to him who never happened to have more than one solitary idea. The pursuit of a single principle has produced a great system, as probably we owe ADAM SMITH to the French economists; and a loose hint has conducted to a new discovery, as GIRARD, taking advantage of an idea first started by Fenelon, produced his "Synonymes." But while in every manual art, every great workman improves on his predecessor, of the art of the mind, notwithstanding the facility of practice, and our incessant experience, millions are yet ignorant of the first rudiments; and men of genius themselves are rarely acquainted with the materials they are working on. Certain con-

stituent principles of the mind itself, which the study of metaphysics curiously developes, offer many important regulations in this desirable art. We may even suspect, since men of genius in the present age have confided to us the secrets of their studies, that this art may be carried on by more obvious means, and even by mechanical contrivances and practical habits. A mind well organised may be regulated by a single contrivance, as by a bit of lead we govern the finer machinery by which we track the flight of time. Many secrets in this art of the mind yet remain as insulated facts, which may hereafter enter into an experimental history.

Johnson has a curious observation on the Mind itself; he thinks it obtains a stationary point, from whence it can never advance, occurring before the middle of life. "When the powers of nature have attained their intended energy, they can be no more advanced. The shrub can never become a tree. Nothing then remains but *practice* and *experience;* and perhaps *why they do so little, may*

*be worth inquiry**." The result of this inquiry would probably lay a broader foundation for this art of the mind than we have hitherto possessed. Adam FERGUSON has expressed himself with sublimity; "The lustre which man casts around him, like the flame of a meteor, shines only while his motion continues; the moments of rest and of obscurity are the same." What is this art of meditation, but the power of withdrawing ourselves from the world, to view that world moving within ourselves, while we are in repose? so the artist, by an optical instrument, reflects and concentrates the boundless landscape around him, and patiently traces all nature in that small space.

There is a government of our thoughts. The mind of genius can be made to take a particular disposition or train of ideas. It is a remarkable circumstance in the studies of men of genius, that previous to composition they have often awakened

* I recommend the reader to turn to the whole passage, in Johnson's Letters to Mrs. Thrale, Vol. I. p. 296.

their imagination by the imagination of their favourite masters. By touching a magnet they became a magnet. A circumstance has been recorded of GRAY, by Mr. Mathias, "as worthy of all acceptation among the higher votaries of the divine art, when they are assured that Mr. Gray never sate down to compose any poetry without previously, and for a considerable time, reading the works of Spenser." But the circumstance was not unusual with Malherbe, Corneille, and Racine; and the most fervid verses of Homer, and the most tender of Euripides, were often repeated by Milton. Even antiquity exhibits the same exciting intercourse of the mind of genius. Cicero informs us how his eloquence caught inspiration from a constant study of the Latin and Grecian poetry; and it has been recorded of Pompey, who was Great even in his youth, that he never undertook any considerable enterprise, without animating his genius by having read to him the character of Achilles in the first Iliad; although he acknowledged that the enthusiasm he caught came rather from the poet than the hero

When Bossuet had to compose a funeral oration, he was accustomed to retire for several days to his study, to ruminate over the pages of Homer; and when asked the reason of this habit, he exclaimed, in these lines,

> ——— magnam mihi mentem, animumque
> Delius inspiret Vates.

It is on the same principle of pre-disposing the mind, that many have first generated their feelings in the symphonies of music. Alfieri often before he wrote prepared his mind by listening to music; "Almost all my tragedies were sketched in my mind either in the act of hearing music, or a few hours after"—a circumstance which has been recorded of many others. Lord Bacon had music often played in the room adjoining his study; Milton listened to his organ for his solemn inspiration, and music was even necessary to Warburton; the symphonies which awoke in the poet sublime emotions, might have composed the inventive mind of the great critic in the visions of his theoretical mysteries. A celebrated French

preacher, Bourdaloue or Massillon, was once found playing on a violin, to screw his mind up to the pitch, preparatory for his sermon, which within a short interval he was to preach before the court. CURRAN'S favourite mode of meditation was with his violin in his hand; for hours together would he forget himself, running voluntaries over the strings, while his imagination in collecting its tones was opening all his faculties for the coming emergency at the bar. When LEONARDO DA VINCI was painting his Lisa, commonly called *La Joconde*, he had musicians constantly in waiting, whose light harmonies, by their associations, inspired feelings of

"Tipsy dance and revelry."

There are slight habits which may be contracted by genius, which assist the action of the mind; but these are of a nature so trivial, that they seem ridiculous when they have not been experienced: but the imaginative race exist by the acts of imagination. HAYDN would never sit down to compose without being in full dress, with his

great diamond ring, and the finest paper to write down his musical compositions. ROUSSEAU has told us, when occupied by his celebrated romance, of the influence of the rose-coloured knots of ribbon which tied his portfolio, his fine paper, his brilliant ink, and his gold sand. Similar facts are related of many. Whenever APOSTOLO ZENO, the predecessor of Metastasio, prepared himself to compose a new drama, he used to say to himself, "*Apostolo! recordati che questa è la prima opera che dai in luce.*" —"Apostolo! remember that this is the first opera you are presenting to the public." We are scarcely aware how we may govern our thoughts by means of our sensations: DE LUC was subject to violent bursts of passion; but he calmed the interior tumult by the artifice of filling his mouth with sweets and comfits. When GOLDONI found his sleep disturbed by the obtrusive ideas still floating from the studies of the day, he contrived to lull himself to rest by conning in his mind a vocabulary of the Venetian dialect, translating some word into Tuscan and French; which being a very uninteresting occupation, at the third or fourth version this recipe

never failed. This was an art of withdrawing attention from the greater to the less emotion; where, as the interest weakened, the excitement ceased. MENDELSOHN, whose feeble and too sensitive frame was often reduced to the last stage of suffering by intellectual exertion, when engaged in any point of difficulty, would in an instant contrive a perfect cessation from thinking, by mechanically going to the window, and counting the tiles upon the roof of his neighbour's house. Such facts show how much art may be concerned in the government of our thoughts.

It is an unquestionable fact, that some profound thinkers could not pursue their intellectual operations amidst the distractions of light and noise; with them, attention to what is passing within is interrupted by the discordant impressions from objects pressing and obtruding on the external senses. There are, indeed, instances, as in the case of Priestley and others, of authors who have pursued their literary works while conversation was proceeding and amidst their family; but such minds are not the most original thinkers, and the

most refined writers; or their subjects are of a nature to require little more than judgment with diligence. It is the mind only which can trace the mind, and brood over thoughts till the incubation produces vitality. Such is the feeling in this act of study. In Plutarch's time they showed a subterraneous place of study built by Demosthenes, and where he often continued for two or three months together. Malebranche, Hobbes, Corneille and others, darkened their apartment, when they wrote, to concentrate their thoughts, as Milton says of the mind, "in the spacious circuits of her musing." It is in proportion as we can suspend the exercise of all our other senses that the liveliness of our conception increases—this is the observation of the most elegant metaphysician of our times; and when Lord Chesterfield advised that his pupil, whose attention wandered on every passing object, which unfitted him for study, should be instructed in a darkened apartment, he was aware of this principle; the boy would learn and retain what he learnt ten times as well. We close our eyes

whenever we would collect our mind together, or trace more distinctly an object which seems to have faded away in our recollections. The study of an author or an artist would be ill placed in the midst of a beautiful landscape; the Penseroso of Milton, "hid from day's garish eye," is the man of genius. A secluded and naked apartment, with nothing but a desk, a chair, and a single sheet of paper, was for fifty years the study of BUFFON; the single ornament was a print of Newton placed before his eyes—nothing broke into the unity of his reveries. Cumberland's liveliest comedy "the West Indian," was written in an unfurnished apartment close in front of an Irish turf-stack; and our comic writer was fully aware of the advantages of the situation. "In all my hours of study," says that elegant writer, "it has been through life my object so to locate myself as to have little or nothing to distract my attention, and therefore, brilliant rooms or pleasant prospects I have ever avoided. A dead wall, or as in the present case, an Irish turf-stack, are not attractions that can call off the fancy from

its pursuits; and whilst in these pursuits it can find interest and occupation, it wants no outward aids to cheer it. My father, I believe, rather wondered at my choice." The principle ascertained, the consequences are obvious.

The arts of memory have at all times excited the attention of the studious; they open a world of undivulged mysteries, where every one seems to form some discovery of his own, rather exciting his astonishment than enlarging his comprehension. LE SAGE, a modern philosopher, had a memory singularly defective; incapable of acquiring languages, and deficient in all those studies which depend on the exercise of the memory, it became the object of his subsequent exertions to supply this deficiency by the order and method he observed in arranging every new fact or idea he obtained; so that in reality with a very bad memory, it appears that he was still enabled to recall at will any idea or any knowledge which he had stored up. JOHN HUNTER happily illustrated the advantages which every one derives from putting his thoughts in writing,

"it resembles a tradesman taking stock; without which he never knows either what he possesses or in what he is deficient." The late WILLIAM HUTTON, a man of an original cast of mind, as an experiment in memory, opened a book which he had divided into 365 columns, according to the days of the year: he resolved to try to recollect an anecdote, as insignificant and remote as he was able, rejecting all under ten years of age; and to his surprise, he filled those spaces for small reminiscences, within ten columns; but till this experiment had been made, he never conceived the extent of this faculty. WOLF, the German metaphysician, relates of himself, that he had by the most persevering habit, in bed and amidst darkness, resolved his algebraic problems, and geometrically composed all his methods merely by the aid of his imagination and memory; and when in the day-time he verified the one and the other of these operations, he had always found them true. Unquestionably such astonishing instances of a well-regulated memory depend on the practice of its art gradually formed, by frequent asso-

ciations. When we reflect, that whatever we know, and whatever we feel, are the very smallest portions of all the knowledge we have been acquiring, and all the feelings we have experienced through life, how desirable would be that art, which should again open the scenes which have vanished, and revivify the emotions which other impressions have effaced. But the faculty of memory, although perhaps the most manageable of all others, is considered a subordinate one; it seems only a grasping and accumulating power, and in the work of genius is imagined to produce nothing of itself; yet is Memory the foundation of Genius whenever this faculty is associated with imagination and passion; with men of genius it is a chronology not merely of events, but of emotions; hence they remember nothing that is not interesting to their feelings. Persons of inferior capacity have imperfect recollections from feeble impressions. Are not the incidents of the great novelist, often founded on the common ones of life? and the personages so admirably alive in his fictions, were they not discovered

among the crowd? The ancients have described the Muses as the daughters of Memory; an elegant fiction, indicating the natural and intimate connexion between imagination and reminiscence.

The arts of memory will form a saving bank of genius, to which it may have recourse, as a wealth which it can accumulate unperceivably amidst the ordinary expenditure. LOCKE taught us the first rudiments of this art, when he showed us how he stored his thoughts and his facts, by an artificial arrangement; and ADDISON, before he commenced his Spectators, had amassed three folios of materials; but the higher step will be the volume which shall give an account of a man to himself, and where a single observation becomes a clue of past knowledge in his hand, restoring to him his lost studies, and his evanescent existence. Self-contemplation makes the man more nearly entire; and to preserve the past, is half of immortality.

The worth of the diary must depend on the diarist; but "Of the things which concern him-

self," as MARCUS ANTONINUS entitles his celebrated work, the volume reserved for solitary contemplation, should be considered as a future relic of ourselves. The late Sir SAMUEL ROMILLY commenced, even in the most occupied period of his life, a diary of his last twelve years; which he declares in his will, "I bequeath to my children, as it may be serviceable to them." Perhaps in this Romilly bore in mind the example of another eminent lawyer; the celebrated WHITELOCKE, who had drawn up a great work, entitled "Remembrances of the Labours of WHITELOCKE, in the Annals of his Life, for the Instruction of his Children." That both these family books have never appeared, is our common loss; such legacies from such men, ought to become the inheritance of their countrymen.

To register the transactions of the day, with observations on what, and on whom, he had seen, was the advice of Lord KAMES to the late Mr. CURWEN; and for years his head never reached its pillow without performing a task which habit had made easy. "Our best and surest road to

knowledge," said Lord KAMES, "is by profiting from the labours of others, and making their experience our own." In this manner CURWEN tells us he acquired by habit *the art of thinking*; and he is an able testimony of the practicability and success of the plan, for he candidly tells us, "Though many would sicken at the idea of imposing such a task upon themselves, yet the attempt, persevered in for a short time, would soon become a custom more irksome to omit, than it was difficult to commence."

Could we look into the libraries of authors, the *studios* of artists, and the laboratories of chemists, and view what they have only sketched, or what lie scattered in fragments, and could we trace their first and last thoughts, we might discover that we have lost more than we possess: foundations without superstructures, once the monuments of their hopes! A living architect recently exhibited to the public an extraordinary picture of his mind, in his "Architectural Visions of early fancy in the gay morning of youth," and which now were "dreams in the evening of life."

In this picture he had thrown together all the architectural designs his imagination had conceived, but which remained unexecuted. The feeling is true, however whimsical such unaccomplished fancies might appear, when thrown together into one picture. In literary history such instances have occurred but too frequently: the imagination of youth, measuring neither time nor ability, creates faster than the industry of age can provide the means of its supply. ADAM SMITH, in the preface to the first edition of his "Theory of Sentiments," announced a large work on law and government; and in a late edition he still repeated the promise, observing, that "Thirty years ago I entertained no doubt of being able to execute every thing which it announced." The "Wealth of Nations" was but a fragment of this greater work. Surely men of genius, of all others, may mourn over the length of art and the brevity of life!

Yet many glorious efforts, and even artificial inventions, have been contrived to save their moral and literary existence in that perpetual race

which genius holds with time. We trace its triumph in the studious days of such men as GIBBON, Sir WILLIAM JONES, and PRIESTLEY. An invention by which the moral qualities and the acquisitions of the literary character were combined and advanced together, is what Sir WILLIAM JONES ingeniously calls his "Andrometer;" in that scale of human attainments and enjoyments which ought to accompany the eras of human life, it reminds us of what was to be learned, and what to be practised, assigning to stated periods their appropriate pursuits. An occasional recurrence, even to so fanciful a standard, would be like looking on a clock, to remind the student how he loiters, or how he advances in the great day's work. Such romantic plans have been often invented by the ardour of genius. There was no communication between Sir WILLIAM JONES and Dr. FRANKLIN; yet when young, the self-taught philosopher of America pursued the same genial and generous devotion to his own moral and literary excellence.

"It was about this time I conceived," says Frank-

lin, "the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection," &c. He began a daily journal in which against thirteen virtues accompanied by seven columns to mark the days of the week, he dotted down what he considered to be his failures; he found himself fuller of faults than he had imagined, but at length, his blots diminished. This Self-examination, or this "Fault-book," as Lord Shaftesbury would have called it, was always carried about him. These books still exist. An additional contrivance was that of journalising his twenty-four hours, of which he has furnished us both with descriptions and specimens of the method; and he closes with a solemn assurance, that "It may be well my posterity should be informed, that to this *little artifice* their ancestor owes the constant felicity of his life." Thus have we seen the fancy of JONES and the sense of FRANKLIN, unconnected either by character or communication, but acted on by the same glorious feeling to create their own moral and literary character, inventing these similar, but extraordinary methods.

The memorials of GIBBON and PRIESTLEY present us with the experience and the habits of the Literary Character. "What I have known," says Dr. Priestley, "with respect to myself, has tended much to lessen both my admiration and my contempt of others. Could we have entered into the mind of Sir Isaac Newton, and have traced all the steps by which he produced his great works, we might see nothing very extraordinary in the process." Our student, with an ingenuous simplicity, opens to us that "variety of mechanical expedients by which he secured and arranged his thoughts," and that discipline of the mind, by a peculiar arrangement of his studies for the day and for the year, in which he rivalled the calm and unalterable system pursued by GIBBON. BUFFON and VOLTAIRE employed the same manœuvres, and often only combined the knowledge they obtained, by humble methods. They knew what to ask for; for there is a sort of invention in research, in that apt conjecture which knows where what is wanted may be found, and then made use of an intelligent secretary; aware, as Lord BACON has

expressed it, that some books "may be read by deputy." BUFFON laid down an excellent rule to obtain originality, when he advised the writer first to exhaust his own thoughts, before he attempted to consult other writers; and GIBBON, the most experienced reader of all our writers, offers the same important advice to an author: when engaged on a particular subject, he tells us, "I suspended my perusal of any new book on the subject, till I had reviewed all that I knew, or believed, or had thought on it, that I might be qualified to discern how much the authors added to my original stock." The advice of Lord BACON, that we should pursue our studies in whatever disposition the mind may be, and however indisposed, is excellent; if happily disposed, we shall gain a great step, and in the other we "shall work out the knots and stands of the mind, and make the middle times the more pleasant." Some active lives have passed away in incessant composition, like those of MOZART, CICERO, and VOLTAIRE, who were restless, perhaps unhappy, when their genius was quiescent. To such minds the constant zeal they bring to their labour

supplies the absence of that inspiration which cannot always be the same, and at its height. Industry is the feature by which the ancients so frequently describe an eminent character; such phrases as "*incredibili industria; diligentia singulari,*" are usual. We of these days cannot conceive the industry of CICERO; but he has himself told us that he suffered no moments of his leisure to escape from him: not only his spare hours were consecrated to his books; but even on days of business he would take a few turns in his walk, to meditate or to dictate; many of his letters are dated before daylight, some from the senate, at his meals, and amidst his morning levees. The titles of his works are those of his various villas where they were composed. The dawn of day was the summons of study to Sir WILLIAM JONES. JOHN HUNTER, who was constantly engaged in the search and consideration of new facts, described what was passing in his mind by a remarkable illustration: he said to Mr. Abernethy, "My mind is like a bee-hive." A simile which was singularly correct; "for," observes Mr. Abernethy, "in the midst of

buzz and apparent confusion, there was great order, regularity of structure, and abundant food, collected with incessant industry from the choicest stores of nature." Thus one man of genius is the ablest commentator on the thoughts and feelings of another. When we reflect on the magnitude of the labours of Cicero, and the elder Pliny, Erasmus, Petrarch, Baronius, Lord Bacon, Usher, and Bayle, we seem asleep at the base of these monuments of study, and scarcely awaken to admire. Such are the laborious instructors of mankind, whose very names excite in us a warm feeling of gratitude.

Nor let those other artists of the mind, who work in the airy looms of fancy and wit, imagine that they are weaving their webs, without the direction of a principle, and without a secret habit which they have acquired, and which some have imagined, by its quickness and facility, to be an instinct. "Habit," says REID, "differs from instinct, not in its nature, but in its origin; the last being natural, the first acquired." What we are accustomed to do, gives a facility and proneness to

do on like occasions; and there may be even an art, unperceived by themselves, in opening and pursuing a scene of pure invention, and even in the happiest turns of wit. One who had all the experience of such an artist has employed the very terms we have used, of "mechanical" and "habitual." "Be assured," says Goldsmith, "that wit is in some measure mechanical; and that a man long habituated to catch at even its resemblance, will at last be happy enough to possess the substance. By a long habit of writing he acquires a justness of thinking, and a mastery of manner, which holiday writers, even with ten times his genius, may vainly attempt to equal." The wit of BUTLER was not extemporaneous, but painfully elaborated from notes which he incessantly accumulated; and the familiar *rime* of BERNI the burlesque poet, his existing manuscripts will prove were produced by perpetual retouches. Even in the sublime efforts of imagination, this art of meditation may be practised; and ALFIERI has shown us, that in those energetic tragic dramas which were often produced in a

state of enthusiasm, he pursued a regulated process. "All my tragedies have been composed three times;" and he describes the three stages of conception, development, and versifying. "After these three operations, I proceed, like other authors, to polish, correct, or amend."

"All is habit in mankind, even virtue itself!" exclaimed METASTASIO; and we may add, even the meditations of genius. Some of its boldest conceptions are indeed fortuitous, starting up and vanishing almost in the perception; like that giant form, sometimes seen amidst the glaciers, opposite the traveller, afar from him, moving as he moves, stopping as he stops, yet, in a moment lost, and perhaps never more seen, although but his own reflection! Often in the still obscurity of the night, the ideas, the studies, the whole history of the day is acted over again. There are probably few mathematicians who have not dreamed of an interesting problem, observes Professor Dugald Stewart. In these vivid scenes we are often so converted into spectators, that a great poetical contemporary of our country thinks that even his

dreams should not pass away unnoticed, and keeps what he calls a register of nocturnals. Tasso has recorded some of his poetical dreams, which were often disturbed by waking himself in repeating a verse aloud. "This night I awaked with this verse in my mouth—

"*E i duo che manda il nero adusto suolo.*"

"The two, the *dark* and burning soil has sent."

He discovered that the epithet *black* was not suitable; "I again fell asleep, and in a dream I read in Strabo that the sand of Ethiopia and Arabia is extremely *white*, and this morning I have found the place. You see what learned dreams I have." But incidents of this nature are not peculiar to this great bard: the *improvisatori* poets, we are told, cannot sleep after an evening's effusion in their way; the rhymes are still ringing in their ears, and imagination, if they have any, will still haunt them. Their previous state of excitement breaks into the calm of sleep; for, like the ocean, when its swell is subsiding, the waves still heave and beat. A poet, whether a Milton or a Black-

more, will ever find that his muse will visit his "slumbers nightly." His fate is much harder than that of the great minister, Sir Robert Walpole, who on retiring to rest could lay down his political intrigues with his clothes; but Sir Robert, to judge by his portrait, and anecdotes of him, had a sleekiness and good-humour, with an unalterable equanimity of countenance, not the portion of men of genius: indeed one of these has regretted that his sleep was so profound as not to be interrupted by dreams; from a throng of fantastic ideas he imagined that he could have drawn new sources of poetic imagery. The historian De Thou was one of those great literary characters, who, all his life, was preparing to write the history which he wrote; omitting nothing, in his travels and his embassies, which went to the formation of a great man, De Thou has given a very curious account of his dreams. Such was his passion for study, and his ardent admiration of the great men whom he conversed with, that he often imagined in his sleep that he was travelling in Italy, in Germany, and in England, where he saw and consulted the

learned, and examined their curious libraries. He had all his life-time these literary dreams, but more particularly when in his travels, he thus repeated the images of the day. If memory does not chain down these hurrying fading children of the imagination, and

"Snatch the faithless fugitives to light"

with the beams of the morning, the mind suddenly finds itself forsaken and solitary. Rousseau has uttered a complaint on this occasion: full of enthusiasm, he devoted to the subject of his thoughts, as was his custom, the long sleepless intervals of his nights; meditating in bed, with his eyes closed, he turned over his periods, in a tumult of ideas; but when he rose and had dressed, all was vanished; and when he sat down to his papers, he had nothing to write. Thus genius has its vespers, and its vigils, as well as its matins, which we have been so often told are the true hours of its inspiration—but every hour may be full of inspiration for him who knows to meditate. No man was more practised in this art of the mind

than POPE, and even the night was not an unregarded portion of his poetical existence, not less than with LEONARDO DA VINCI, who tells us how often he found the use of recollecting the ideas of what he had considered in the day after he had retired to bed, encompassed by the silence and obscurity of the night. Sleepless nights are the portion of genius when engaged in its work; the train of reasoning is still pursued; the images of fancy catch a fresh illumination; and even a happy expression shall linger in the ear of him who turns about for the soft composure to which his troubled spirit cannot settle.

But while with genius so much seems fortuitous, in its great operations the march of the mind appears regular, and requires preparation. The intellectual faculties are not always coexistent, or do not always act simultaneously; whenever any particular faculty is highly active, while the others are languid, the work, as a work of genius, may be very deficient; hence the faculties, in whatever degree they exist, are unquestionably enlarged by *meditation*. It seems trivial to observe that meditation should

precede composition, but we are not always aware of its importance; the truth is, that it is a difficulty unless it be a habit. We write, and find we have written ill; we rewrite and feel we have written well: in the second act of composition we have acquired the necessary meditation. Still we rarely carry on our meditation so far as its practice would enable us; many works of mediocrity might have approached to excellence, had this art of the mind been exercised. Many volatile writers might have reached even to deep thinking, had they bestowed a day of meditation before a day of composition, and thus detained their thoughts. Many productions of genius have originally been enveloped in feebleness and obscurity, which have only been brought to perfection by repeated acts of the mind. There is a maxim of Confucius, which in the translation seems quaint, but is pregnant with sense—

> "Labour, but slight not meditation;
> Meditate, but slight not labour."

Few works of magnitude presented themselves

at once, in their extent and with their associations to their authors; two or three striking circumstances, unobserved before, are perhaps all which the man of genius perceives; it is in revolving the subject that the whole mind becomes gradually agitated; as a summer landscape, at the break of day, is wrapt in mist: at first, the sun strikes on a single object, but the light and warmth increasing, the whole scene glows in the noonday of imagination. How beautifully this state of the mind, in the progress of composition, is described by DRYDEN, alluding to his work, "when it was only a confused mass of thoughts, tumbling over one another in the dark; when the fancy was yet in its first work, moving the sleeping images of things towards the light, there to be distinguished, and then either to be chosen or rejected, by the judgment." At that moment, he adds, "I was in that eagerness of imagination, which, by over-pleasing fanciful men, flatters them into the danger of writing." GIBBON tells us of his history, "at the onset, all was dark and doubtful; even the title of the work, the true era of

the decline and fall of the empire, &c. I was often tempted to cast away the labour of seven years." WINCKELMAN was long lost in composing his "History of Art;" a hundred fruitless attempts were made, before he could discover a plan amidst the labyrinth. Slight conceptions kindle finished works: a lady asking for a few verses on rural topics, of the Abbé De Lille, his specimens pleased, and sketches heaped on sketches, produced "Les Jardins." In writing the "Pleasures of Memory," as it happened with "the Rape of the Lock," the poet at first proposed a simple description in a few lines, till conducted by meditation, the perfect composition of several years closed in that fine poem. That still valuable work, *L'Art de penser* of the Port Royal, was originally projected to teach a young nobleman all that was practically useful in the art of logic in a few days, and was intended to have been written in one morning by the great ARNAULD; but to that profound thinker, so many new ideas crowded in that slight task, that he was compelled to call in his friend NICOLLE; and thus a few projected

pages closed in a volume so excellent, that our elegant metaphysician has recently declared, that "it is hardly possible to estimate the merits too highly." Pemberton, who knew NEWTON intimately, informs us, that his treatise on Natural Philosophy, full of a variety of profound inventions, was composed by him from scarcely any other materials than the *few propositions he had set down several years before*, and which having resumed, occupied him in writing one year and a half. A curious circumstance has been preserved in the life of the other immortal man in philosophy, Lord BACON. When young he wrote a letter to Father Fulgentio concerning an Essay of his to which he gave the title of "The greatest Birth of Time," a title which he censures as too pompous; the Essay itself is lost, but it was the first outline of that great design which he afterwards pursued and finished in his "Instauration of the Sciences." LOCKE himself has informed us, that his great work on "the Human Understanding," when he first put pen to paper, he thought "would have been contained in one sheet, but

that the farther he went on the larger prospect he had. In this manner it would be beautiful to trace the history of the human mind, and observe how a NEWTON and a BACON and a LOCKE were proceeding for thirty years together in accumulating truth upon truth, and finally building up their systems.

Were it possible to collect some thoughts of great thinkers, which were never written, we should discover vivid conceptions, and an originality they never dared to pursue in their works! Artists have this advantage over authors, that their virgin fancies, their chance felicities, which labour cannot afterwards produce, are constantly perpetuated; and these "studies" as they are called, are as precious to posterity, as their more complete designs. In literature we possess one remarkable evidence of these fortuitous thoughts of genius. POPE and SWIFT, being in the country together, observed, that if contemplative men were to notice "the thoughts which suddenly present themselves to their minds when walking in the fields, &c. they might find many as well worth

preserving as some of their more deliberate reflections." They made a trial, and agreed to write down such involuntary thoughts as occurred during their stay there; these furnished out the "Thoughts" in Pope's and Swift's Miscellanies*. Among Lord Bacon's Remains, we find a paper entitled "*sudden thoughts*, set down for profit." At all hours, by the side of VOLTAIRE's bed, or on his table, stood his pen and ink with slips of paper. The margins of his books were covered with his "sudden thoughts." CICERO, in reading, constantly took notes and made comments. There is an art of reading, as well as an art of thinking, and an art of writing.

The art of meditation may be exercised at all hours, and in all places; and men of genius, in their walks, at table, and amidst assemblies, turning the eye of the mind inwards, can form an artificial solitude; retired amidst a crowd, and wise amidst dis-

* This anecdote is found in Ruffhead's Life of Pope, evidently given by Warburton, as was every thing of personal knowledge in that tasteless volume of a mere lawyer, writing the life of a poet.

traction and folly. When DOMENICHINO was reproached for his dilatory habits in not finishing a great picture for which he had contracted, his reply described this method of study. *Eh! Io la sto continuamente dipingendo entro di me.* I am continually painting it within myself. HOGARTH, with an eye always awake to the ridiculous, would catch a character on his thumb-nail; LEONARDO DA VINCI has left a great number of little books which he usually carried in his girdle, that he might instantly sketch whatever he wished to recall to his recollections; and Amoretti discovered that in these light sketches, this fine genius was forming a system of physiognomy which he frequently inculcated to his pupils. HAYDN carefully noted down in a pocket-book the passages and ideas which came to him in his walks or amidst company. Some of the great actions of men of this habit of mind were first meditated on, amidst the noise of a convivial party, or the music of a concert. The victory of Waterloo might have been organized in the ball-room at Brussels; as RODNEY at the table of Lord

Sandwich, while the bottle was briskly circulating, was observed arranging bits of cork: his solitary amusement having excited an inquiry, he said that he was practising a plan how to annihilate an enemy's fleet; this afterwards proved to be that discovery of breaking the line, which the happy audacity of the hero executed. What situation is more common than a sea-voyage, where nothing presents itself to the reflections of most men than irksome observations on the desert of waters? But the constant exercise of the mind by habitual practice is the privilege of a commanding genius; and, in a similar situation, we discover CICERO and Sir WILLIAM JONES acting alike. Amidst the Oriental seas, in a voyage of 12,000 miles, the mind of JONES kindled with delightful enthusiasm, and he has perpetuated those elevating feelings in his discourse to the Asiatic society; so CICERO on board a ship, sailing slowly along the coast, passing by a town where his friend Trebatius resided, wrote a work the other had expressed a wish to possess, and of which the view of the town had reminded him.

To this habit of continuity of attention, tracing the first simple idea to its remoter consequences, the philosophical genius owes many of its discoveries. It was one evening in the cathedral of Pisa, that GALILEO observed the vibrations of a brass lustre pendent from the vaulted roof, which had been left swinging by one of the vergers; the habitual meditation of genius combined with an ordinary accident a new idea of science, and hence, conceived the invention of measuring time by the medium of a pendulum. Who but a genius of this order, sitting in his orchard, and observing the descent of an apple, could have discovered a new quality in matter, and have ascertained the laws of attraction, by perceiving that the same causes might perpetuate the regular motions of the planetary system; and, while viewing boys blowing soap-bladders, discover the properties of light and colours, and then anatomised a ray? FRANKLIN on board a ship observing a partial stillness in the waves when they threw down water which had been used for culinary purposes, by the same principle of meditation was led to

the discovery of the wonderful property in oil of calming the agitated ocean; and many a ship has been preserved in tempestuous weather, or a landing facilitated on a dangerous surf, by this solitary meditation of genius.

Thus meditation draws out of the most simple truths the strictness of philosophical demonstration; converting even the amusements of school-boys, or ordinary domestic occurrences, into the principle of a new science. The phenomenon of galvanism was familiar to students; yet was there but one man of genius who could take advantage of an accident, give it his name, and fix it as a science. It was while lying in his bath, but still meditating on the means to detect the fraud of the goldsmith who had made Hiero's crown, that the most extraordinary philosopher of antiquity was led to the investigation of a series of propositions demonstrated in the two books of ARCHIMEDES, *De insidentibus in fluido*, still extant; and which a great mathematician admires both for the strictness and the elegance of the demonstrations. To as minute a domestic occurrence as

GALVANI'S, we owe the steam-engine. When the Marquis of WORCESTER was a state prisoner in the Tower, he one day observed, while his meal was preparing in his apartment, that the cover of the vessel being tight, was, by the expansion of the steam, suddenly forced off, and driven up the chimney; his inventive mind was led on in a train of thought in reference to the practical application of steam as a first mover. His observations, obscurely exhibited in his "Century of Inventions," were successively wrought out by the meditations of others, and terminated in that noblest example of mechanical power. To an incident to which one can hardly make a formal reference without exciting a risible emotion, Great Britain is indebted for her commercial ascendancy in the scale of nations*.

Into the stillness of meditation the mind of genius must be frequently thrown; it is a kind of darkness which hides from us all surrounding objects, even in the light of day. This is the first state of

* Dr. Olinthus Gregory's Oration.

existence in genius.—In Cicero's treatise on Old Age, we find Cato admiring Caius Sulpitius Gallus, who when he sat down to write in the morning, was surprised by the evening; and when he took up his pen in the evening, was surprised by the appearance of the morning. SOCRATES sometimes remained a whole day in immoveable meditation, his eyes and countenance directed to one spot, as if in the stillness of death. LA FONTAINE, when writing his comic tales, has been observed early in the morning and late in the evening, in the same recumbent posture under the same tree. This quiescent state is a sort of enthusiasm, and renders every thing that surrounds us as distant as if an immense interval separated us from the scene. Poggius has told us of DANTE, that he indulged his meditations more strongly than any man he knew; for when deeply busied in reading, he seemed to live only in his ideas. Once the poet went to view a public procession; having entered a bookseller's shop, and taken up a book, he sunk into a reverie; on his return he declared that he had neither seen nor heard a single oc-

currence in the public exhibition, which had passed unobserved before him. It has been told of a modern astronomer, that one summer night, when he was withdrawing to his chamber, the brightness of the heavens showed a phenomenon: he passed the whole night in observing it; and when they came to him early in the morning, and found him in the same attitude, he said, like one who had been recollecting his thoughts for a few moments, "It must be thus; but I'll go to bed before it is late." He had gazed the entire night in meditation, and was not aware of it. Mr. Abernethy has finely painted the situation of NEWTON in this state of mind. I will not change his words, for his words are his feelings. "It was this power of mind—which can contemplate the greatest number of facts or propositions with accuracy—that so eminently distinguished NEWTON from other men. It was this power that enabled him to arrange the whole of a treatise in his thoughts before he committed a single idea to paper. In the exercise of this power, he was known occasionally to have

passed a whole night or day, entirely inattentive to surrounding objects."

There is nothing incredible in the stories related of some who have experienced this entranced state in study, where the mind, deliciously inebriated with the object it contemplates, feels n o thing, from the excess of feeling as a philosopher well describes it:—the impressions from our exterior sensations are often suspended by great mental excitement. ARCHIMEDES, involved in the investigation of mathematical truth, and the painters PROTOGENES and PARMEGGIANO found their senses locked up as it were in meditation, so as to be incapable of withdrawing themselves from their work even in the midst of the terrors and storming of the place by the enemy. MARINO was so absorbed in the composition of his "Adonis," that he suffered his leg to be burnt before the painful sensation grew stronger than the intellectual pleasure of his imagination. Monsieur THOMAS, a modern French writer, and an intense thinker, would sit for hours against a hedge, composing

with a low voice, taking the same pinch of snuff for half an hour together, without being aware that it had long disappeared: when he quitted his apartment, after prolonging his studies there, a visible alteration was observed in his person, and the agitation of his recent thoughts was still traced in his air and manner. With eloquent truth BUFFON described those reveries of the student, which compress his day, and mark the hours by the sensations of minutes! "Invention depends on patience: contemplate your subject long; it will gradually unfold till a sort of electric spark convulses for a moment the brain, and spreads down to the very heart a glow of irritation. Then come the luxuries of genius, the true hours for production and composition; hours so delightful, that I have spent twelve or fourteen successively at my writing-desk, and still been in a state of pleasure." Bishop HORNE, whose literary feelings were of the most delicate and lively kind, has beautifully recorded them in his progress through a favourite and lengthened work—his Commentary on the Psalms. He allŭdes to himself in the third

person; yet who but the self-painter could have catched those delicious emotions which are so evanescent in the deep occupation of pleasant studies? "He arose fresh in the morning to his task; the silence of the night invited him to pursue it; and he can truly say, that food and rest were not preferred before it. Every part improved infinitely upon his acquaintance with it, and no one gave him uneasiness but the last, for then he grieved that his work was done."

This eager delight of pursuing his study, with this impatience of interruption, and this exultation in its progress, are finely described by MILTON in a letter to his friend Diodati.

"Such is the character of my mind, that no delay, none of the ordinary cessations for rest or otherwise, I had nearly said, care or thinking of the very subject, can hold me back from being hurried on to the destined point, and from completing the great circuit, as it were, of the study in which I am engaged*."

* "Meum sic est ingenium, nulla ut mora, nulla quies,

Such is the picture of genius viewed in the stillness of MEDITATION; but there is yet a more excited state, when as if consciousness were mixing with its reveries in the illusion of a scene, of a person, of a passion, the emotions of the soul affect even the organs of sense: it is experienced in moments when the poet in the excellence of invention, and the philosopher in the force of intellect, alike share in the hours of inspiration and the ENTHUSIASM of genius!

nulla ferme illius rei cura aut cogitatio distineat, quoad pervadam quo feror, et grandem aliquem studiorum meorum quasi periodum conficiam."

END OF VOL. I.

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